5000 Years of Indian Art demystifies the story of India art spread over the millennia. This visually stunning book is a rare example of a volume that offers a panoramic view of Indian art from the pre-historic times to contemporary period. The absorbing narrative woven around the wide ambit of the creative continuum links different predominant artistic genres like pre-historic art, ancient Indian art of Vedic and Buddhist traditions, temple art, Mughal miniature painting, colonial art, modern Indian art, and contemporary art that were prevalent in different eras instead of formally demarcated historical periods. The illustrated tale encompasses the entire gamut ranging from the earliest primitive markings on stones, caves, and frescos to exquisite paintings, sculptures, modern photography, and finally crafted artefacts to media-inspired work, popular installations, and other forms of contemporary art.

The significant works discussed in this book include Bhimbetka cave paintings, notable figures and sculptures from the Indus Valley Civilization, Ajanta and Ellora cave paintings, Khajuraho and Konark temple art, Mughal miniature paintings from key texts like *Akbarnama*, portraiture, among others. There is also a critical appreciation of select works created by renowned artists like Mazhar Ali Khan, Raja Ravi Varma, Lala Deen Dayal, Nandalal Bose, F.N. Souza, Raghu Rai, K.G. Subramanyam, M. F. Husain, S.H. Raza, Tyeb Mehta, Thukral and Tagra, Anish Kapoor, Subodh Gupta, Mithu Sen, et al.

The book displays around 200 select masterpieces of art sourced from museums, galleries, and private collections around India and the world that celebrate Indian art. The essays; art historical map; timeline delineating developments in politics, culture, and art in different eras; images with lucid elucidations; box stories make the book both informative and interesting to scholars, students, and anyone with an interest in Indian art.

The history of Indian art is as old as the civilization itself and every major period of history has given it newer modes of expression and forms of art. This book successfully captures all the myriad influences that have enriched Indian art over the years.

Front cover: The Bodhisattva as an Ascetic, 2nd century AD

SHOUT
SHARE
IT

5000 Years of
INDIAN ART

5000 Years of
INDIAN ART

Text by **Sushma K Bahl**

Facing page: Bodhisattva Padmapani
Cave 1 at Ajanta, 5th century AD

Lustre Press
Roli Books

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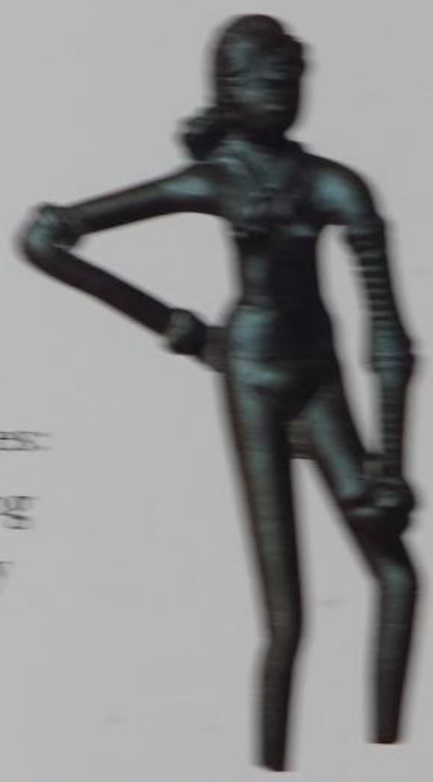

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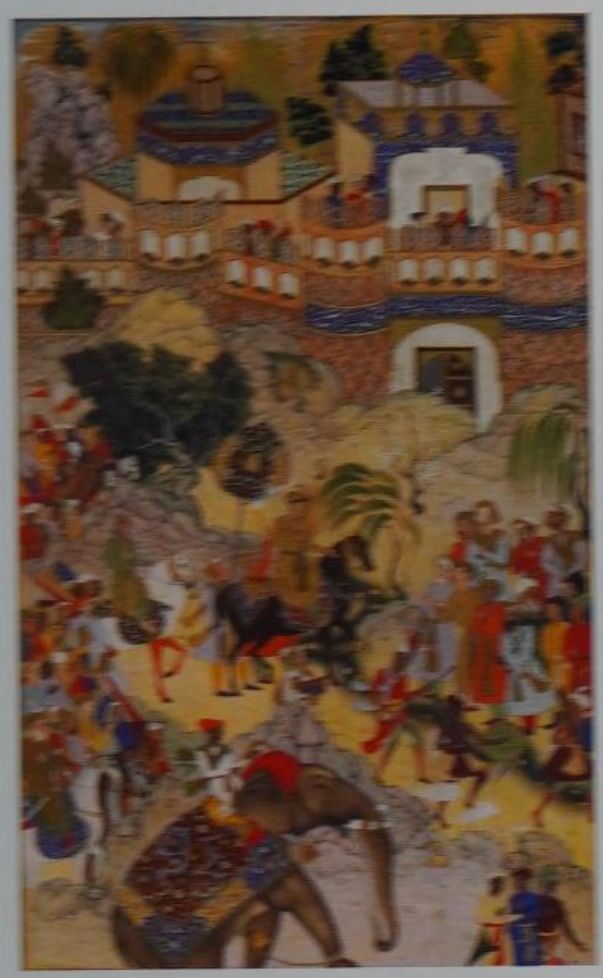

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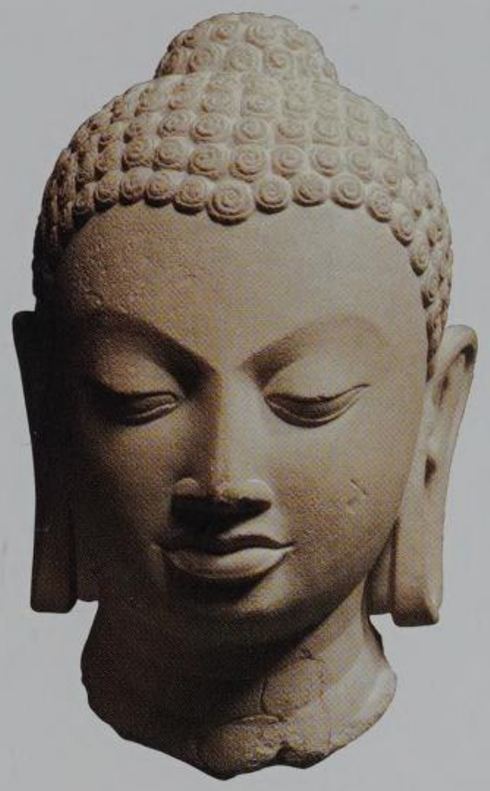


Buddha Head, Gupta period, 5th century
Facing page: The Kailasanatha temple of Kanchipuram, 8th century

Preface

MASTERPIECES
Celebrating Creativity

Unravelling the story of living arts of India entwined in the history, religion, and philosophy of the unfragmented subcontinent of the yore, which can be traced back to 30,000 BC, has been an immensely exciting and complex exercise. Exciting because of the vastness of the domain, including some hitherto un-treaded tracks, and complex because of the constraints imposed by limited availability of documentary material— illustrative, oral, or written— on the multilayered ancient narrative. The visually rich Indian art is known for its simultaneity and multiplicity of seemingly contradictory but significantly assimilative layers. And even where some imprints could be sketched, the great divergence in their interpretations opens the field to conjecture, debate, and further challenges.

The ancient Indian civilization is a complex mystical conundrum with its manifold cultures and sub-cultures, numerous religions and faiths, hundreds of spoken and written languages and scripts (some of which are yet to be deciphered), enormous regional variations spread across a vast and varied geographic terrain with different climatic conditions, costumes, food habits, and a long history of invasions and dynastic eras. There is an enormous repository of artefacts representing different artistic genres of different times and in diverse domains under varied dynasties; hence, this narrative about Indian art goes back and forth to thread different links into a cohesive sum of its parts.

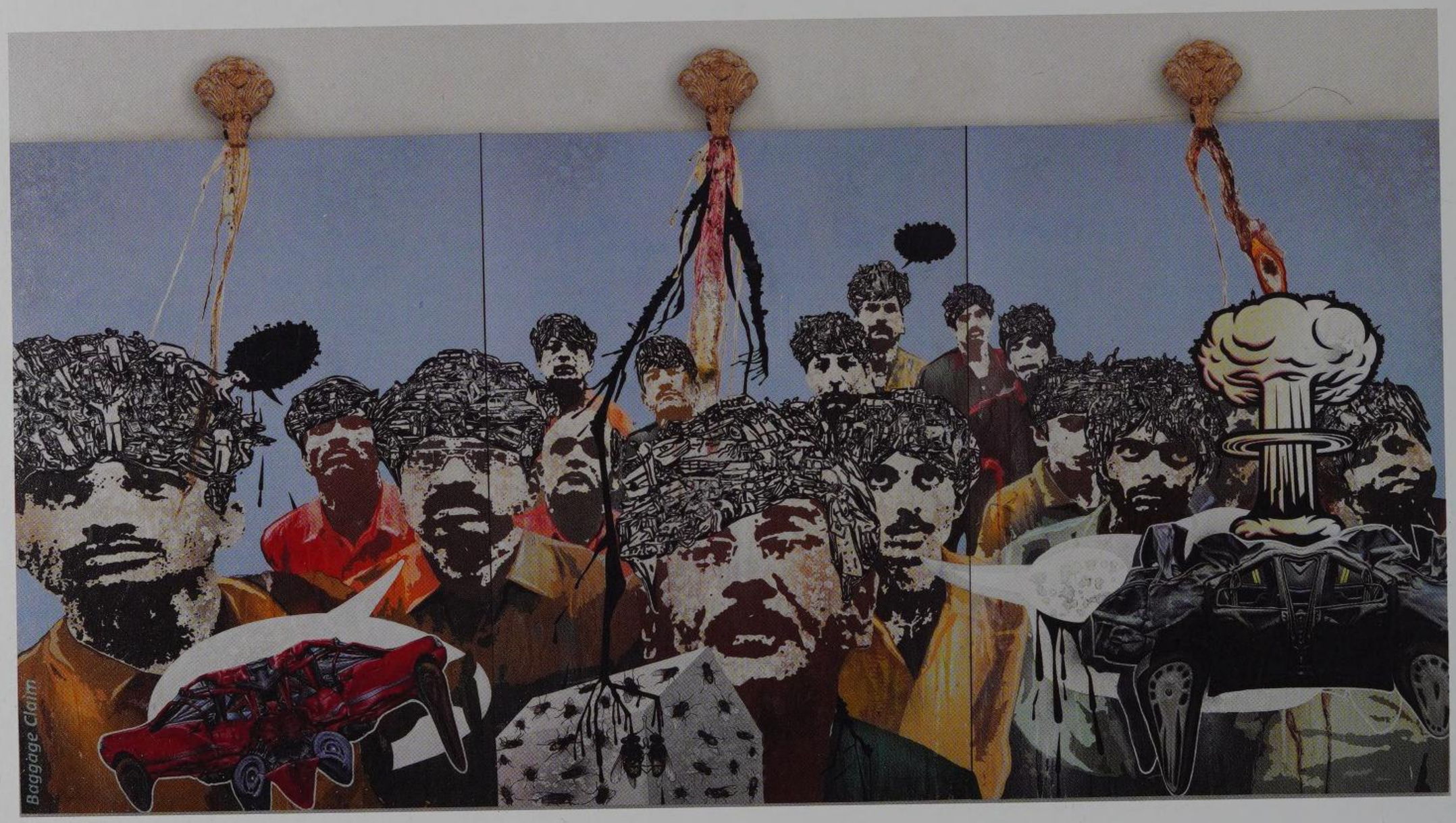
To fathom the maze, about 200 significant masterpieces of art spanning over the centuries and representing varied regional, dynastic, philosophical, and artistic domains of the country are featured to help appreciate this fascinating story. The selected works are mainly paintings and sculptures, representing various genres of fine art across the spectrum. India's extremely rich and acclaimed traditions of living arts encompassing tribal, folk, and decorative art and crafts, which have a unique place in the country's art and aesthetics, could not be represented here due to the scope of this volume and other practical constraints. The brief annotations contextualize each work of art within the socio-religious-political dynamics of the given age bringing alive the facets they represent. The illustrated tale encompasses the entire gamut ranging from the earliest primitive markings on stones and frescos to exquisite paintings, ancient sculptures, modern photography, and finally crafted artefacts to popular installation, and other forms of contemporary art.

Cheap Rice by Subodh Gupta, rickshaw, brass utensils and metal, 2006
Facing page: Shah Jahan receiving prince Aurangzeb at his wedding, illustration to the *Padshahnama* by Abdul Hamid Lahori, 1640

The pictorial and textual thrust aims for a wider readership. The map, timeline, notes on basic art historical terms and concepts, and bibliography have been added to help the reader appreciate the story and if required to follow the leads for further study. The narrative has been woven around broad sweeps of the creative continuum linking different artistic genres that were predominant through a given era rather than formally demarcated historical periods. The dates and details listed for the artworks are based on the information provided by the museums where they are displayed or other documentary evidence available at the time.

The book celebrates Indian art as a distinct entity, integral to a highly evolved ancient civilization, hence assessed in its own context instead of being misconstrued by the confines of a Western art historical viewfinder. The research findings of several academics and art historians have helped form the base for the book, and achieve this aim. And I am greatly indebted to all of them.

I am grateful to Priya Kapoor of Roli Books for initiating the idea and inviting me to author the book. My special thanks are due to the many eminent experts at the National Museum, Archaeological Survey of India, British Museum, Victoria and Albert Museum, and several other institutions as well as independent art historians across India and internationally with whom I have interacted over the years. My involvement with the first ever Festival of India held in the UK (1982) and the subsequent exhibition 'King of the World: Padshahnama' that came to the National Museum in Delhi gave me the opportunity to interact with the best in the field which has stood me well in planning and writing this book. I would like to thank Dr Kapila Vatsyayan, Prof B. N. Goswamy, Dr T. Richard Blurton, Dr Robert Skelton, Dr George Michell, Catherine Lampert, and Dr Deborah Swallow in particular. I would also like to thank my two researchers Aashima Rathee and Archana B. Sapra for their unstinting support. And last but not the least, I thank my family especially my husband, Om, for his great emotional support that kept me going whenever I felt overstretched and my grandchildren Sahil, Ayush, Uditi, and Mehul who kept track of how the book was shaping up through their constant enquiries, love, and care.



Baggage Claim , Jitish Kallat, 2010

Art Historical Map of India

Note: The map depicts several cities of art historical relevance, some modern Indian cities, and a few neighbouring countries of India. India is depicted with contemporary International boundaries.

Begram
Gandhara
Afghanistan
Srinagar
Alchi
Jammu
Chamba
Basohli
Kangra
Lahore
Amritsar
Kulu
Harappa
Pinjore
Mehrgarh
Pakistan
China
Sikri
Mohenjodaro
Delhi
Tibet
Nepal
Ahichachhatra
Bhutan
Chanhu-daro
Mathura
Lumbini
Amber
Agra
Kishangarh
Gwalior
Didarganj
Buxar
Patna
Nathadwara
Bundi
Sarnath
Kota
Bodhgaya
Karachi
Chunar
Deogarh
Khajuraho
Bangladesh
Murshidabad
Udaygiri
Bharhut
Sanchi
Plassey
Bhopal
Bhimbetka
Cambay
Chandraketugarh
Bagh
Mandu
Kolkata
India
Myanmar
Aurangabad
Ajanta
Dhauli
Ellora
Konark
Daimabad
Mumbai
Elephanta
Bijapur
Nagarjunakonda
Aihole
Amaravati
Badami
Hampi
Goa
Arabian Sea
Bay of Bengal
Lepakshi
Kanchipuram
Chennai
Mysore
Mamallapuram
Gangaikonda cholapuram
Chidambaram
Andaman & Nicobar Islands (India)
Thanjavur
Lakshadweep Islands (India)
Kochi
Thiruvara-ngalam
Sri Lanka
Indian Ocean

MAP NOT TO SCALE

Pre-Historic Roots of Indian Art

(30000 BC – 1500 BC)

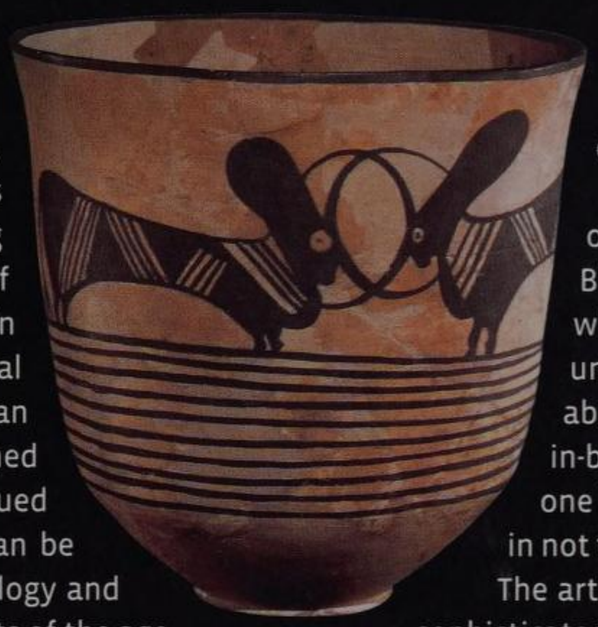
View of the Great Bath at Mohenjdaro, Pakistan, Indus Valley Civilization, 3rd millennium BC

'*Chittam chittenaiva chintitam,*' Buddha is believed to have said.

An artistic creation (*chittam*), such as a painting, sculpture, or an allied form, is a stroke of genius imagination (*chittenaiva*) and essentially a product of the functioning of the mind (*chintitam*), according to Indian belief. This concept of art as a creative expression of timeless value is elucidated further in early texts like the *Shilpa Shastras*, which provide artists theoretical principles with conceptual depth. The nuances in the art of the Indian subcontinent connected to this philosophy and inextricably intertwined with its history, society, culture, and religion, occasionally misconstrued as overtly ornate and sensuous from Western art historical view, can be understood and appreciated better when contextualized in the ideology and culture they stem from. Free expression in tune with the developments of the age is a characteristic that has run as a continuum in Indian art, from its dawn to the contemporary times, as expounded in the story that follows.

About 30,000 years ago (the date though contested), the genesis of this philosophy is reflected in the largest repository of pre-historic rock shelters of the Vindhya Range, especially at Bhimbetka, situated at the heart of India in the state of Madhya Pradesh. In these cave sites, rock art is inscribed, drawn, and painted with stones, bones, and twigs using natural pigments like vegetal extracts and minerals grounded and mixed with water or animal fat. The presence of these inscriptions among other things provides circumstantial evidence of pre-agricultural communities living in one of the oldest known site of the subcontinent. Explorations so far have revealed 642 rock shelters of which many are covered with drawings and engravings featuring different species of animals that are still abound in the area. Hunting scenes also depict hunters carrying sticks, spears, bows, and arrows sometimes accompanied by dogs, horses, deers, etc. The archaeologists have found interesting illustrations of Mother Goddess, traps, animal chase, stick figures, and animal forms rendered in the manner of X-rays, depicting inner organs. The male figures and dancers are shown wearing masks or crowns or horned headdresses.

Horse riders with spears on a hunt, Bhimbetka Rock Shelters, pre-historic era



Painted ceramic with bull imagery, Indus Valley Civilization, 2500 BC (above)

The tribals of the region even today paint the mud walls of their homes with similar images to ward off evil spirits and invoke good fortune.

The story of eons ago that started with findings of Stone Age tools and sketches of everyday life at Bhimbetka was followed by a long period of darkness with no archaeological evidence to fill the gap in the story until the highly evolved era of the Indus Valley civilization about 3000 BC. What course did the art and culture of the in-between period took is a subject of great intrigue, which one hopes will be resolved with newer studies and findings in not too distant a future.

The artistic legacy of the subcontinent appearing next is the sophisticated urban culture of the Indus Valley Civilization, dating from 3000 BC to 1200 BC in and around the cities of Harappa and Mohenjodaro. First discovered along the Indus River basin, in modern day Pakistan, the cities of the ancient civilization appear with well laid-out plans on a grid pattern and houses equipped with baths and drainage systems. Mohenjodaro with its finely built brick structures and multi-roomed residential areas, thoroughfares, and north–south alignment was the centre where the ancient population of about 35,000 to 40,000 people lived. The Indus river with its five great tributaries, which flowed through the plains of Punjab, made the region fertile and prosperous with trading and cultural contacts extending to the Persian Gulf and Central Asia. The civilization had a unique writing system, which is yet to be decoded and a highly developed understanding of town planning. Its aesthetic sensibility is exemplified in the finely adorned terracotta sculptures of the Mother Goddess and carved steatite seals, which were used for rituals and trade.

The stone seals with their intricately layered imagery, which were first carved with burin, then coated with alkali, and finally baked to achieve a glazed finish, reveal the technical sophistication of the civilization. The seals frequently depict a unicorn, a one-horned mythical creature and the humped zebu bull, both of which have ritualistic associations. The inscriptions on the seals associated with trade markings point to the city's importance as a commercial centre.

As is often the case with archaeological discoveries, the site was found accidentally in 1865, when the nearby mounds became the source of bricks for laying the foundation of the railroad, which was being built to connect Lahore with the port city of Karachi. The bricks, well-fired and of uniform dimensions led archaeologists to excavate and unearth the city of Harappa. Also discovered among the ruins were sculptures, figurines, jewellery, and other utility and ritual artefacts such as the Mother Goddess, fertility and phallic symbols made mainly of terracotta, stone, and bronze. A clearer picture of the culture of the era will emerge once the script in which the inscriptions were written is deciphered. Meanwhile, it is excavations and studies that link the findings with the ancient Indus Valley Civilization prevailing across a vast expanse of about one million square kilometres, from the highlands of Afghanistan through parts of Pakistan and up to the coastal stretch of Gujarat, with a flourishing culture that lasted for approximately 2, 000 years. Its decline appears to have set in towards the end of 2nd millennium BC, which may have been due to the invasion by the Indo Aryans or caused by the ecological alterations in the region. The invasion and eventual settlement of the Aryans brought in a culture, which absorbed both the philosophical and social ideology of the Aryans into the mainstream of indigenous Dravidian elements, laying the ground for Vedic traditions.

BHIMBETKA, CAVE PAINTINGS

The primordial rock shelters in the Vindhya Range of central India are replete with paintings, inscriptions, petroglyphs, etc. Bhimbetka is believed to be the largest repository of prehistoric art, which is about 30,000 years old. It is a UNESCO listed world heritage site. The excavated material here includes stone tools and Chalcolithic pottery, Mesolithic rock art with etched images of rituals, fertility, divinities, battle scenes, and hunting. There is enough circumstantial evidence of pre-agricultural Stone Age communities. The paintings located in pitch dark cave interiors and drawn several times over chronicle the evolution of the civilization. Layers that started as single line sketches of simple life in the wild, changed to agricultural motifs with time. The imagery painted in natural pigments, charcoal, and animal and plant extracts with fingers, feathers and twigs, speaks of the different epochs that Bhimbetka had witnessed.

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ca. 30000 BC (contested)
Artist: Unknown
Cave paintings in mineral colours on rocks
Dimensions: Variable
In situ at Raisen district, Madhya Pradesh, India

MOTHER GODDESS

This terracotta figurine with her bulging breasts and wide hips suggests notions of fertility, procreation, and motherhood. A subtle tinge of yellow and ochre is discernible on her body which is adorned with a multilayered patterned necklace and heavily coiled hair, perched on both sides of the head, and possibly painted with a black slip originally. Her face with a protruding nose and inset open eyes seems engulfed by the hairdo. She is seated with her arms tucked under her breasts and legs crossed, with the body bent slightly forward. In this posture she appears self-absorbed. The tiny form from the Neolithic Age suggests a developed pattern of clay sourcing and manufacturing in the Indus Valley. Several such burnt and broken figurines found in the alluvial expanse of Kachi–Bolan plains between the 8th millennium BC and 3rd millennium BC, suggest a significant ritual and religious role of females as mother goddesses that continued to survive well into the wider region and through subsequent cultural eras.

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ca. 3000 BC
Artist: Unknown
Terracotta sculpture
Height: 9.5 cm
From Mehrgarh, Baluchistan,
Indian subcontinent
In the collection of the
Islamabad Museum, Islamabad, Pakistan

STORAGE JAR

This storage jar in terracotta was excavated from the Chanhu-daro settlement in the lower Indus valley. It represents the most common type of pottery of the Harappan civilization, which is painted black-on-red ware. The jar is tall and made from fired clay in a buff-coloured finish. Its body curves gradually below the neck to form a bulging, rounded bottom that requires the support of a stand to stay upright. The jar has leaf motif as its central theme. It is also decorated with an assortment of other motifs like vegetal and geometric forms, and painted in a red slip with dark brown and black. The neck is marked with a string of squares with arched tops within each of which is placed the symbol of a circle enclosing a dot. The rest of the body of the jar is covered with intersecting circles with the central one overlaid with more circles endowing the jar with an elegant appearance.

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ca. 2600 BC –1900 BC
Artist: Unknown
Terracotta pottery
Height: 55.3 cm
From Chanhu-daro, Indian subcontinent
In the collection of the
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, USA

MAN CARRYING A MALE INFANT

This image offers an interesting visual of the Bronze Age (2600 BC–1200 BC) society in India. Although the mother goddess and fertility cult of the Indus Valley Civilization is more widely known, several male figurines have also been discovered from the Mohenjodaro and other Harappan sites, which is spread over one million square kilometres of the area in India and Pakistan. The male figures are nearly always depicted in a standing position whereas the female ones are featured mainly seated. The figurine is different from traditional practice as it suggests a role reversal. His posture is firm with rigid arms and legs, flat chest, and a slender waistline and hips with appliquéd eyes, nose, and penis. The arm bands, anklets, and headdress are akin to what is seen in female forms of the era.

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ca. 2550 BC
Artist: Unknown
Terracotta figurine
Height: 12.4 cm
From Indus Valley, Indian subcontinent
In the collection of the
Islamabad Museum, Islamabad, Pakistan

PASUPATI SEAL

The Indus seal discovered by Sir John Marshall features a male figure seated in a yogic posture with the soles of his feet pressed together, arms stretched out, thumbs resting on his knees, fingers pointing downwards, and erect penis. The highly formal stance suggests a specific meditative *asana* or yoga posture. The part-human part-animal figure is wearing a headgear with horns. He could be linked to the 'bull-man' which is largely considered to be the prototype of Hindu god Shiva. The animals— elephant, tiger, rhinoceros, and buffalo— surrounding the figure also give credence to its association with Shiva as Pasupati, the lord of beasts. The distinctive 'bull man' seal inset with what looks like ritual symbol, illustrates Harappan religious practices suggestive of Vedic connection. The totemic representation of ancient philosophical concepts and religious practices is an important feature of the art and culture of the era.

ca. 2300 BC–1750 BC
Artist: Unknown
Steatite sculpture
Height: 3.4 cm
From Mohenjodaro, Indus Valley, Indian subcontinent
In the collection of the National Museum, New Delhi, India

DANCING GIRL

The tiny statuette of the young girl from Mohenjodaro is cast from bronze using lost wax method, which speaks of a thorough knowledge of anatomy and metal technology in Indian antiquity. This nude figurine with her endearing lanky body, modelled sans fleshiness is stylistically at variance from art of other cultures of the time. Her elongated limbs in pipe-like form and of un-naturalistic proportions appear graceful through its confident posturing. The bedecked body with bent legs has the left one moved slightly forward and the right arm resting on the right hip. This posture suggests that she is a lady of authority or a dancer beating her feet to the rhythm of some music. Her many necklaces, armful of bangles, which tribal Indian women wear even today, coiled hair tied into a bun at the back, high-held forehead, pouting lips, and insolent look speak of Indian social life of the era.

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ca. 2100 BC–1750 BC
Artist: Unknown
Bronze sculpture
Height: 11.5 cm
From Mohenjodaro, Indus Valley,
Indian subcontinent
In the collection of the National Museum,
New Delhi, India

PRIEST-KING

This bust of a powerful bearded man from Mohenjodaro is one of the few carved stone sculptures found from the Indus sites. The figuration with half-closed eyes, one of which was inlaid with a shell when found, straight nose, full lips, bearded chin, a mark on the forehead, a head-band with ends tied in a knot at the back, and wearing a decorated robe, suggests a Mesopotamian or other Western Asiatic influence. His hairstyle and garment, which is covering his left shoulder, are particularly notable as these are different from contemporary local fashion. The shoulder stole does emerge in subsequent Buddhist forms. The trefoil pattern on the surface where the shoulder garment appears is said to have been filled with red paste when found. Sir Mortimer Wheeler, whose research extensively focused on Indus civilization, has identified the figure as a priest–king or a high-ranking official because of his meditative eyes and headdress. While the meditative posture suggests his religious affiliation as a priest, the headdress, which is similar to crowns and turbans worn by the royals and nobles in the later years points to a royal connection, hence his identification as a priest–king.

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ca. 2200 BC–1750 BC
Artist: Unknown
Steatite sculpture
Height: 17.5 cm
From Mohenjodaro, Indus Valley, Indian subcontinent
In the collection of the National Museum, Karachi, Pakistan

FERTILITY GODDESS

This delicate female figurine from Mohenjodaro, crafted in a stiff, erect posture, represents a typical terracotta creation from the settlements of the Indus Valley region. The figure is appliquéd with pellets which represent the breasts, eyes, jewellery, belt, and other features including the elaborate coiffure. She adorns pointed earrings, a choker, and a beaded necklace with a pendant that falls between her breasts. The small woman's enormous headdress fanned out in cup-shaped wide extensions of braided tresses on either side of her head is particularly noteworthy. Although the female form is associated with motherhood and hence fertility, procreation, and a continuity of life in Indian art since the beginning, the divine status of this figurine seems uncertain in the absence of any supporting attribute or evidence.

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ca. 2100–1750 BC
Artist: Unknown
Terracotta sculpture
Height: 15 cm
From Mohenjodaro, Indian subcontinent
In the collection of the National Museum, New Delhi, India

The *Vedas*

The *Vedas* is a large body of sacred Hindu texts. They are the main sources of knowledge on ancient India in the absence of other reliable evidence. The *Rig Veda* is the oldest of the four prime scriptures with 1028 hymns. It is dated between 1500 BC and 900 BC and was composed orally in Sanskrit. The other three are *Yajur Veda*, *Sama Veda*, and *Atharva Veda*. *Brahmanas* and *Upanishads*, which were composed later, are further elaborations of the principles laid down in the *Vedas*. All these scriptures were recited and chanted orally as *mantras* and were written down much later around 500 BC. The *Vedas* extol the mystery of sacrifice and its cosmic significance. It identifies God with *atman* (self or spirit) that is omnipresent and promotes the idea of *karma* (actions) and cycle of life. According to *Rig Veda*, society evolved into four *varnas* or castes: *Brahmin* (the priest), *Kshatriya* (the warrior), *Vaisya* (merchant), and *Shudra* (menial worker). This philosophy laid the foundations for the stratification of Indian society on the basis of caste, which has continued to impact not only the political and social culture of the nation but also its art and architecture.

The art of religious writings in India began with the Vedic period around 2nd century BC
Offerings to the River Ganga at Varanasi (above left)

CHARIOT

The figure is one of the four artefacts discovered from an archaeological mound at Daimabad in Ahmednagar, northeast of Mumbai, which extends the geographical coverage of the Harappan civilization beyond the Indus Valley proper. The chariot is yoked to two bulls and driven by a standing man. It is cast in bronze with lost wax technique. The solid wheels with sockets and an axle, the chassis and the frame above with two vertical beams are secured by cross-bars. The wheels can be dismantled and reassembled, which suggests a remarkable workmanship and technology, possibly heralding an early stage in the evolution of vehicles. The heavy bodied animals with pronounced humps and stocky legs appear highly stylized. The charioteer has a small face, receding forehead, and small eyes but a long neck. His torso is bare and he is leaning forward wielding a stick over the animals, perhaps to prompt movement. Although the archaeological and metallurgical evaluation for dating the work is still inconclusive, the elongated figure of the charioteer is similar to the figurine of the young girl from Mohenjodaro, which is from around 2100–1500 BC.

---

ca. 1500 BC
Artist: Unknown
Bronze sculpture
Dimensions: 22 x 52 x 17.5 cm
From Daimabad, Maharashtra, India
Archaeological Survey of India,
New Delhi, India

Ancient Indian Art: The Vedic and Buddhist Traditions

(1500 BC Onwards)

Detail from a depiction of the *Chhadanta Jataka*, from a gateway of the Great Stupa at Sanchi, Shunga dynasty, ca. AD 20.
Embossed gold coins, Mauryan period, 3rd-2nd BC (facing page)

One can conjecture about the socio-religious and artistic practices of the Vedic period from about 1500 BC to the turn of the era on the basis of abstract philosophical concepts of Aryan and Dravidian civilizations, as described in the ancient scriptures such as the *Vedas* and oral narratives together with a study of the techniques and materials used during the period falling between the decline of the Indus Valley civilization and the ascent of the Mauryan rule in India. The epic period of Vedic civilization that began with the invasion of the Aryans, followed by their merging with the indigenous Dravidians, flourished on the Indo-Gangetic plains of the subcontinent. The foundation of Hindu religion was laid down during the Vedic period that also saw the introduction of the caste system into the mainstream fabric of Indian society.

The Aryans inhabited small houses which were round and square shaped with tower-like structures in the plains and forests of the north, built with readily available materials such as bamboo, thatch, wood, and only later, bricks. The Dravidians on the other hand, were possibly beginning to build pyramid-shaped temples in stone and statues of deities and warriors. The later Vedic texts mention fertility cult worship and use of metals such as tin, lead, silver, and iron for rituals. The layout of the Indo-Aryan villages and cities of the period was based on metaphysical concepts. These were largely rectangular with intersecting roads and gateways, possibly as imprints of the city planning of the Indus Valley Civilization. Different epics including the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* describe the division of the city into four separate quarters for different communities and castes. They also describe painted shrines, *yagna* or fire altars and assembly halls for religious and ritual practices. In the Malabar region in south India, one finds rock-cut domed chambers with monolithic stone column at the centre, which were probably built as burial caves for the Aryan chieftains. These stone structures were presumably a progression from the round huts of the Vedic period which were mainly in wood and thatch.

Most of the information about the bygone Vedic era is based on oral history and remains cloaked in mystery in the absence of more reliable documentation or archeological evidence. The story, thereafter, jumps to around 325 BC with the conquest of the frontier provinces across the vast stretches of the Indus region by Alexander the Great. Although he was forced by his mutinous soldiers to return to Greece, he had left behind many people in India to control the region which included artists, sculptors, and writers who adapted to the indigenous culture of *mahajanpadas* or Great Communities. This resulted in a merging of Greek elements into Indian architecture and sculpture, which is known as Greco-Hellenistic or Gandhara art. The style entailed combining elements of the evolving Buddhist iconography rendered in a realistic oeuvre and made in schist, predating those in stucco.

A dramatic change in the political and artistic map of the country began with the decline of the early *mahajanpadas* and the emergence of the Mauryan monarchs and Buddhism as a popular religion. Chandragupta Maurya (322 BC–297 BC) who was the first imperial ruler of India and founder of the dynasty, and his grandson Emperor Ashoka (272 BC–231 BC) were great patrons of arts and the newly emerging religion of Buddhism.

Ashoka who was a great believer in Buddhism, used it astutely to ensure political stability in the fractured society. Inspired by Lord Buddha's messages of peace, he got edicts inscribed in Prakrit at strategic public locations on natural rocks as well as stone pillars. These inscriptions stand amongst the first evidence of written history in India. Large blocks of stones quarried from Chunar near Pataliputra (modern Patna), the Mauryan capital, were chiselled and polished to create some magnificent monolithic sculptures including the large stylized lions, which formed the capital of the Ashokan pillar at Sarnath. The capital is India's national emblem now.

Initially Buddha and his teachings were represented symbolically through *stupas*, which are essentially mounds containing his relics, and in abstract forms and emblems like the *triratna* or triple-gem and the empty throne, moving to figural representation only later in the 2nd century AD. Circumambulation which was initially performed in the open was later incorporated into the plan of the *stupa*, and with further additions and changes more refined forms of *stupas* began to appear. A big spurt in artistic activity led to several new monumental structures and sculptures, besides small carved ivories and moulded terracotta artefacts.

Besides Buddhism, Jainism was also patronized by the kings. Jainism is based on the teachings of Mahavira who was the last and most important of the 24 *tirthankaras* or saints born in mid-6th century BC in eastern India. The religion advocates vegetarianism and non-violence. Its theology and monastic set-up, which is similar to Buddhism, was supported largely by the merchant communities. These communities also supported artisan guilds and commissioned illustrated manuscripts on palm leaves and religious icons used for personal and community worship.

The Mauryan Empire was followed by the Shunga Empire between 2nd and 1st century BC, during which Indian art saw a thrust for decorative elements as depicted in the stone railings and gateways surrounding Buddhist *stupas* built during the reign of this dynasty. The carvings of *yakshas* and *yakshis* or semi-divine guardian figures depicted amidst nature on the uprights, demonstrate an emphasis on folk deities and animals. The Shungas also added such adornments at the entrance-ways marking the four cardinal points of the existing Buddhist structures in bricks, including the one at Bharhut, an important ancient trade route. The adornments were possibly done to leave their mark for the travellers and for posterity.

A high level of technical finesse marks the art and architecture of this period, such as the Sanchi gateways reliefs, achieved with recession technique by placing figures above and behind one another. Endowed with a sense of rhythm, the narratives appear in collectives of sculptural groups integral to

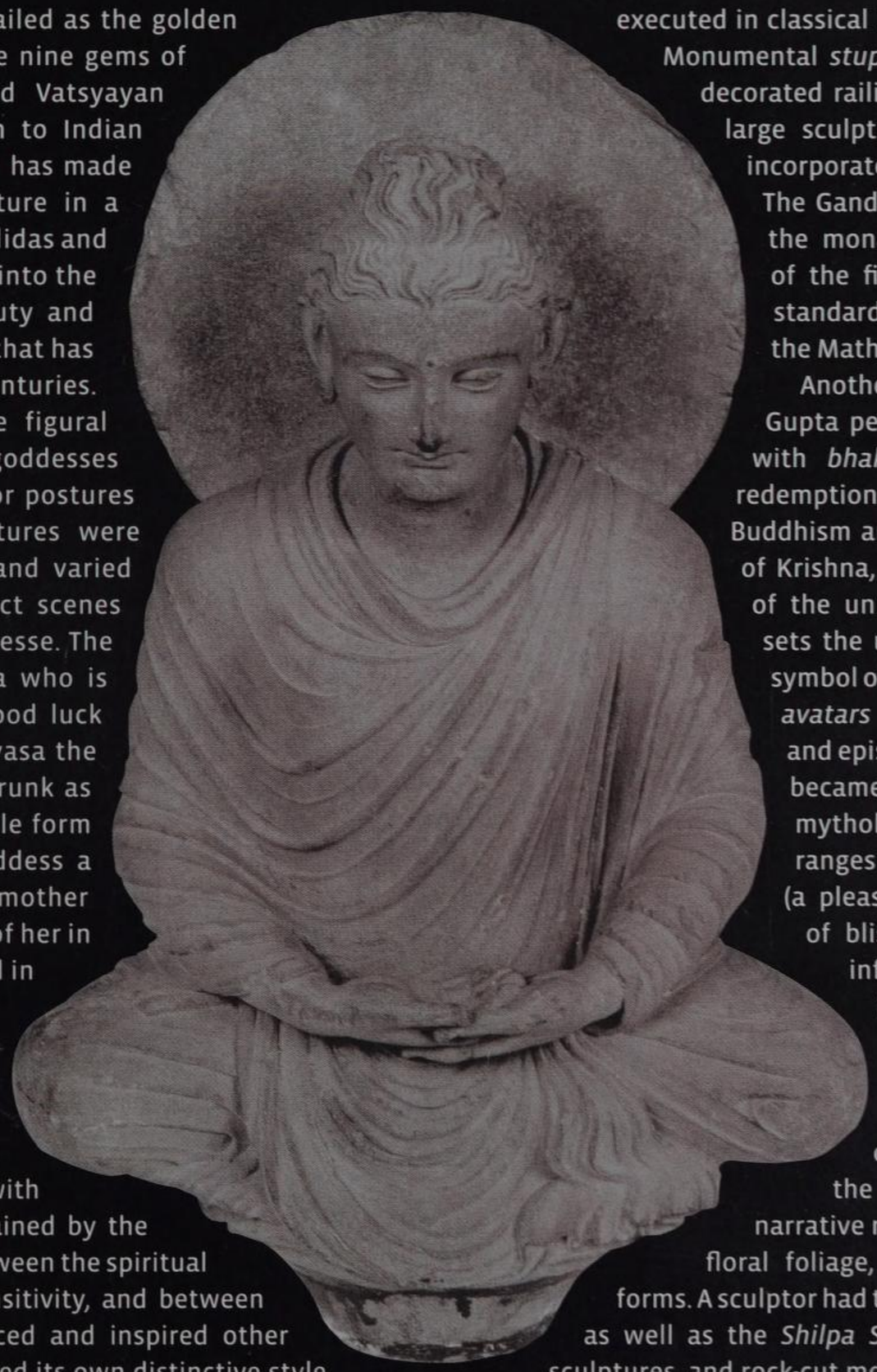
the monumental complexes with pillared verandas and decorated gateways. This sense of movement is best experienced when such artistic creations are encountered in their full glory and *in situ* integral form. When isolated fragments are uprooted from their natural environment and context for display in galleries and museums, much of their aesthetic and philosophical layering is lost.

Between the 3rd and 5th century AD, the Satavahanas built the Buddhist monuments of Ellora and Amravati known for their distinct sculptural figures and decorations. They also played a vital role in an exchange of ideas between the people of the Indo-Gangetic plains and southern India and are credited with introducing coins embossed with images of the rulers in India. A large collection of slabs from the great *stupa* at Amravati in Andhra Pradesh along with sacred relics of Buddha built between 1st and 3rd century AD is presently displayed at the British Museum, London, and the Government Museum at Chennai. The next phase in the story of Indian art begins during the 1st century AD with the Kushanas of ancient Bactria expanding their empire to northwest frontier of India, now Pakistan and Afghanistan. The most successful of the Kushana kings was Kanishka (AD 78–AD 140), who had links with Han China in the east and Rome in the west. This helped bring into the country, Persian and Greco-Roman artistic traditions that were adopted, adapted, and carried forward by the indigenous artistic practices as recorded in the textual accounts and inscriptions in Chinese and other languages. The import of stones from Rome and export of gold coins, gems, and jewellery, and figurines facilitated artistic exchanges and synergies. Traces of Hellenistic art that followed Alexander from Asia Minor through Iran into Central Asia flowered in Indian art and architecture of the period. By the late 2nd century AD, the Buddhist art form transformed completely with the introduction of the iconic and the quintessential image of the Buddha characterized by his downward looking eyes and spiritual mode as opposed to his earlier aniconic

Site view at Vaishali with a *stupa* and Ashokan Pillar, Bihar, 3rd century BC
Seated Buddha, Gandhara School, AD 200 (facing page)

tradition. The Bodhi tree under which Buddha attained enlightenment, the wheel which symbolizes his first sermon, and the *stupa* signifying his *parinirvana* (final release from the cycle of death and re-birth), appeared on the horizon altering the subsequent course of Indian Buddhist and narrative art.

The Gupta dynasty (AD 320–AD 550) is hailed as the golden period or classical phase of Indian art. The nine gems of Indian civilization, including Kalidas and Vatsyayan who are renowned for their contribution to Indian culture lived during this period. Each gem has made an enormous contribution to Indian culture in a specific sphere. The poet and playwright Kalidas and Vatsyayan the author of *Kamasutra* delved into the concept of beauty especially female beauty and gave it a canonical expression in literature that has influenced visual art of India over the centuries. Under the patronage of the Guptas, the figural imagery of Buddha and the Hindu gods and goddesses in numerous different forms and *mudras* or postures including body dynamics and hand gestures were created to articulate different concepts and varied narratives. Several steles in Sarnath depict scenes from Buddha's life etched with love and finesse. The elephant-headed pot-bellied Lord Ganesha who is worshipped for being the harbinger of good luck and is believed to have scribed for sage Vyasa the epic *Mahabharata* by using his detached trunk as a pen has emerged as the most recognizable form during this period. Images of Devi or goddess a symbol of fertility and reproduction, as a mother incarnate of life on earth as well as images of her in other forms like Durga or Kali also appeared in the art of this era.



While the Gandhara art flourished in the northwest, Mathura near Delhi emerged as another important centre of art particularly for free standing sculpture during the Gupta period. The quality of Mathura art with timelessness of its idiom can only be explained by the perfect balance that the artists achieved, between the spiritual and the sensual, between strength and sensitivity, and between form and adornment. Mathura art influenced and inspired other smaller centres such as Sarnath, which evolved its own distinctive style with linearity during the latter half of the 5th century. Although the Mathura and Gandhara schools of art and architecture share the common theme of similar iconic images they differ in their spirit and rendition of the imagery and its finer details. The Gandhara sculptures mainly in schist or clay are a blend of Indian with classical Hellenistic and Greco-Roman influences. In the Mathura school of art, the sculptures are in pink sandstone and Buddha is depicted in a human form which is possibly inspired by the *yaksha* imagery with the focus on his spiritual journey.

The great caves at Ajanta and Elephanta were carved and painted during the later Gupta period. A preference for imaginative rendering over naturalistic forms underscores the statuary with more proportionate figures that allows a play of the artist's inner impulses in its adornments. Large statues and scenes from the life of Buddha and Hindu idols were executed in classical Indian style with delicacy in modelling. Monumental *stupas* and rock-cut temples with lavishly decorated railings, carved gateways, and columns as large sculptural installations and wall paintings, incorporate both Gandhara and Mathura styles. The Gandhara style is reflected in elements like the monastic robe for covering the shoulders of the figure and the full-bodied Buddha and standardized Shiva and Vishnu forms represent the Mathura style.

Another parallel development during the Gupta period was the rise of the Hindu temple with *bhakti* (devotion) movement for human redemption that challenged the dominance of both Buddhism and Brahmanism around AD 330. Deities of Krishna, the divine lover; Vishnu, the creator of the universe; Shiva, the divine dancer who sets the universe in motion; and Devi, the dual symbol of power and nurturing each in numerous *avatars* (incarnations) along with characters and episodes from *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* became popular, relegating Vedic gods to a mythological realm. Shiva's iconography which ranges from *lalita* (a graceful dance) to *chatura* (a pleasurable dance), or *tandava* (the dance of bliss) emerging from this era is greatly influenced by Bharata's *Natyashastra*, the key treatise on dance, drama, and music written sometime between the 1st century BC and the 4th century AD.

An emphasis on *alamkar* or ornamentation, an essential feature of the religious art of the era, is reflected in narrative reliefs with repetitive motifs of animals, floral foliage, and geometric designs in cascading forms. A sculptor had to be well versed with the *Vastu Shastras* as well as the *Shilpa Shastras*. Large temples, monumental sculptures, and rock-cut monasteries took centuries to evolve with hundreds of assistants and labourers working under the master artist. From the 8th century onwards when canons as templates for sculptors and builders as outlined in the 6th century iconographic text *Visnudharmottara* started getting established, structural temples began to supersede the excavated rock-cut ones. Gupta period was at the crossroads where the Buddhist art at its summit, intersected with the Hindu art in its genesis, as reflected in the subsequent Hindu rock-cut caves and structures at Badami, Aihole, Ellora, Elephanta, Aurangabad, and Mamallapuram.

ANTHROPOMORPH

The anthropomorphic figure recovered from the basin of Ganges river in modern-day Uttar Pradesh is from the collection of ancient copper objects such as axes, rings, and figural sculptures found in the area. The flattish artefact cast from moulds and embellished with hammering rather than through the lost wax process appears to have been made by indigenous people. The figure is characterized by semi-circular blunted head resting upon shoulders with arms stretched inward, open pointed legs with abstract markings. It may be a functional implement, fertility symbol or it may have had some ritual significance though no conclusive evidence has been found to-date to confirm either affiliation. There is one school of thought that believes the form represented erstwhile missiles! With such divergent views on its purpose, the figure continues to fascinate scholars of ancient Indian art.

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ca. 1200 BC
Artist: Unknown
Copper sculpture
Dimensions: 39 x 36 cm
From Shahabad, Uttar Pradesh, India
In the collection of the
National Museum, New Delhi, India

ASHOKA LION CAPITAL

The Ashokan pillar at Sarnath where Buddha preached his first sermon is an exquisite example of single piece stone sculpture and the official emblem of the Indian republic. With an inscribed stump, the four roaring lions facing the four cardinal directions symbolize the Buddha as *Chakravartin*. The lions with their flame-like mane sit on an abacus carved with four animals—lion, elephant, bull, and horse—in a clockwise direction with four small wheels in-between each. The lion is a symbol of royalty and a totem of the Shakya clan. Its open mouth signifies a call for unity. The lions sit atop a drum which is mounted on a lotus with the *chakra* (wheel) in the middle. The *chakra* is an important symbol of the cosmic order in accordance with the *Upanishads*, epic scriptures, and Buddhism. An enormous wheel that originally stood above the lions has disappeared.

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ca. mid-3rd century BC
Artist: Unknown
Sculpture in polished sandstone
Height: 213.5 cm
From Sarnath, Uttar Pradesh, India
In the collection of the Site Museum at Sarnath, Uttar Pradesh, India

RAMPURVA BULL CAPITAL

This bull capital sculpture standing majestically erect is part of one of the pair of pillars found near Pataliputra. The sculpture is carved in Chunar sandstone with three vertical components: the young bull with its naturally modelled bones and soft muscles at the top, the abacus decorated with honeysuckle patterns and rosettes in the middle, and the bell-shaped upturned lotus at the bottom. The round body rendered with natural beauty and bulging with energy stands poised on the pedestal to exemplify the finesse and love with which such animal sculptures were made by Indian artists of the yore. The humped or Bahamani bull, which is marked for its fine proportions and supple anatomy is a fascinating blend of Western Asiatic elements with Indian creativity. Its genitals are marked in relief with four legs planted firmly on the platform. It has soft nostrils and attentive ears. The symmetrical precision in the mass of the bull's body makes it a masterpiece of Ashokan stone art of the Mauryan period. It is reminiscent of the Indus Valley Civilization which exemplifies the continuity of an artistic tradition for naturalistic representation of life and animal figures.

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ca. 323 BC–185 BC
Artist: Unknown
Sculpture in polished sandstone
Height: 205 cm
From Bihar, India
In the collection of the Rashtrapati Bhavan (Presidential House), New Delhi, India

DIDARGANJ YAKSHI

The life-size free-standing *yakshi* or the fertility goddess carved out of a single stone is one of the earliest Indian visualization of ideal female beauty. This sculpture was found in 1917 in Pataliputra (modern-day Patna), the capital of Maurya dynasty. The sensuous figure with glossy skin, voluptuous body, hourglass waist, wide hips, and torso bent forward under the weight of her full breasts, heavy with milk was a symbol of fertility, abundance, earth spirit, and motherhood. The modelled monumental sculpture depicts burnished surface with elegant naturalism. The graceful figure carries a *chauri* or fly-whisk in her right hand. She is bedecked in crown, earrings, necklaces, armbands, anklets, and her torso is bare. This well-endowed *yakshi* regarded as one of the finest example of Indian art has been exhibited in museums around the world and may have originally had a companion figure to flank some temple doorway.

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ca. 300 BC–100 BC
Artist: Unknown
Sculpture in polished sandstone
Height: 163 cm
From Didarganj in Bihar
In the collection of the Patna Museum,
Patna, Bihar, India

COINS

The first documented coinage is deemed to have been 'punch marked' and dated around 7th century BC. Ancient coins made of silver, copper, lead, and gold bear symbols of animals, deities, and other forms. These were initially issued by the merchant guilds or *janapadas*, small states, and later by the Mauryan, kings. They were used for trading. The gold coins shown here were minted during the Mauryan reign. The lightweight tiny circular coins in precious metal were decorated with elaborately decorated borders and have punch-mark motifs drawn from nature. The motifs include flora and fauna, hunters besides inscriptions of kings not visible here. Human figure is occasionally seen on coins minted during the era. Such coins incorporated Hellenistic traditions of gods and goddesses apart from portraits of the issuers. The Mauryan coins highlight the existence of a thriving single currency economy over the vast empire.

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ca. 300 BC
Artist: Unknown
Gold coins
Dimensions: 12.5 x 14 mm each approximately
Weight: 3.35 gm (32 *rattis*) approximate average
Possibly from northern India

RINGSTONE

The ringstone with rope-like coils enclosing stars, bars, and honeysuckle motifs around female figures that signify the earth goddess represent the female generative sex organ or *yoni*. It was discovered in one of the urban centres along the trade route between Taxila and Patna. The sculpture carved in polished sandstone echoes the concept of fertility that started with the Indus Valley Civilization and continued to proliferate in later Indian art. Symbols of procreation such as this were important for early agricultural societies that depended on nature's bounty for their well-being. *Yoni* in this context was perceived as an eternal and universal motif for regeneration and the endless cycle of birth and death. The relief work on the decorative band is of high aesthetic merit and strikes a fine balance between the carved and the vacant spaces. The geometric patterns of *chakras* (wheels) and *yantras* (magical diagrams) on stone rings point to their ritual or meditative use.

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ca. 300 BC
Artist: Unknown
Sculpture in polished sandstone
Dimensions: 4.9 cm diameter
From north India
In the collection of the
Museum für Indische Kunst,
Berlin, Germany

MONOLITHIC ELEPHANT

The massive sculpture carved on a living rock at the foothills in Dhauli, where the battle of Kalinga is believed to have been fought, represents the front of a bulky elephant. The animal appears in a placid dynamism as its heavy trunk curls gracefully in a naturalistic portrayal. The large and powerful elephant with its slightly raised right leg suggests a forward movement. Although unfinished, the elephant is carved in harmony with the natural surroundings adding a dignified beauty to the site. Located in close proximity to Ashoka's edicts, the sculpture is executed differently from the celebrated animal figures of Sarnath and stands tall as one of the earliest available sculptures in animal studies from Orissa.

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ca. 300 BC
Artist: Unknown
Stone sculpture
Dimensions: Colossal
In situ at Dhauli near Bhuvaneshwar, Orissa, India

CHANDRA YAKSHI

The sculpture of the goddess is part of a railing from Bharhut. It is carved in pink sandstone with lotus medallions. She is the tree nymph Chandra Yakshi, one of the semi-divine deities with pan-Indian acceptance, worshipped by Buddhists and Hindus alike, and often placed at the entrance of *stupas* and temples for adornment and protection. She is holding to a branch of a flowering tree and is depicted in a graceful dancing *mudra* (posture) atop her mount, a mythical creature. She characterizes the Ashoka *dohada* motif or the 'two-hearted one', which signifies a pregnant woman whose body contains her own heart and that of her unborn child. The term is also used for plants at budding stage waiting for the touch of a beautiful expectant woman to cause them to bloom. This tree nymph with a bare torso and face turned sideways has a sense of rhythm and sensuality in her bejewelled body. This seems to make a departure from a somewhat lifeless sculptural figuration of the preceding years.

ca. 100 BC–80 BC
Artist: Unknown
Sculptural segment in sandstone
Height: 250 cm
From Bharhut, Madhya Pradesh, India
In the collection of the Indian Museum, Kolkata, West Bengal, India

GODDESS WITH ATTENDANTS

The Shunga period (185 BC to 1st century BC) plaque from 24 Paraganas of West Bengal is known for its rich heritage of objects moulded in readily available terracotta depicting a complex narrative. The cluster of villages in Chandraketugarh in the early historic times was an important trade and political centre. It was connected by the Vidyadhari river to the Ganga delta as suggested by findings from the region. The buff coloured plaque somewhat unusual for terracotta artefacts of the period, which were normally in brick red or reddish brown, features elaborately, ornamented female figures and other forms. The bejewelled goddess-like figure in the centre is possibly Durga with her right hand in *varada mudra*—a gesture that suggests granting of a boon. Her voluptuous body and exposed pudendum adorning a re-generative pacific mien is endowed with an enigmatic martial touch by her large and beaded coiffure bedecked with weapon-like hairpins. In contrast, her attendants in their diminutive form appear more humble. The purpose of such plaques is unclear. They could be used for offerings. They represent interesting co-habitation of power or *shakti* with benevolence or fertility in the same icon, which is reflective of the complexity of life mirrored in ancient Indian art.

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ca. 50 BC
Artist: Unknown
Terracotta plaque
Dimensions: 26.7 x 20 cm
From Chandraketugarh, West Bengal, India
In the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, USA

BRACKET FIGURE AS SHALABHANJIKA

The alluring sensuous beauty of the curvaceous *Shalabhanjika* from the East gate of the Sanchi Stupa reverberates with ancient Indian concepts of female fertility and abundance. The beautifully carved tree-nymph with her pudendum in full view is possibly a *yakshi* (semi-divine female spirit). Her bare torso sporting only a single pearl necklace that falls between her fulsome breasts, she stands on one foot beneath a mango tree, bending to the left and twining the other foot at the back. She leans forward with her one arm wrapped around the tree and the other grasping the fruit-laden branch above. The finely carved elephants, peacocks, and other forms in the cross bar (not visible here) are integral to the composition. Her elaborate hairdo, heavy hips, and adornments of bracelets, anklets, and a girdle speak of the openness of the society of the time with the sacred and the sexual coming together. It also illustrates the progression of the artistic skills from a rigid frontal figuration to a three-dimensional contoured beauty.

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ca. AD 20–AD 30
Artist: Unknown
Architectural segment in sandstone
Height: 70 cm
In situ at Sanchi, Madhya Pradesh, India

BIMARAN RELIQUARY

This gold reliquary belonging to the Kushana dynasty was excavated from the site of Stupa 2 at Bimaran. It was found in a steatite globular casket with the gold lid and bone relic missing. A few coins recovered from the same locale suggest its origin from AD 50. This finding indicates relic veneration among Buddhists. Buddha's robes, belongings, bones, and other bodily relics kept in burial mounds or *stupas* were revered by the followers as an embodiment of his living presence. One notices a fine assimilation of the Gandhara style with concurrent Hellenistic–Greek aesthetics in the depiction of standing Buddhas in *abhaya mudra*, a gesture of benevolence and reassurance, accompanied by Hindu gods Brahma, Indra, and attendant deities in each of the eight arches.

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ca. AD 50
Artist: Unknown
Reliquary in gold with garnets
Height: 6.5 cm
From Bimaran, Indian subcontinent
In the collection of the British Museum, London, UK

BEGRAM BOX LID

The box cover made up of six pieces of ivory joined together features four women in full figuration and ornamentation. Two of them are playing with a bird and the other two are applying make-up. Although unclothed, the full breasted, voluptuous figures are similar to early stone sculptures of the 2nd century produced across the north and centre of Indian subcontinent. The border decorations with bead motifs and vine scrolls appear Hellenistic. The classic Indian style of this composition with integrated Western motifs indicates a mixed cultural heritage. The box cover with highly skilled ivory carving of ancient India was amongst many other objects excavated at Begram near Kabul. The bronzes from Greece, lacquer from Han China, and Roman glass, etc., found in this region testify to the trading links across the region under the Kushana dynasty.

ca. AD 150
Artist: Unknown
Decorative object in ivory
Dimensions: 29 x 46.5 cm
From Begram, ancient Kapisha
In the collection of the Kabul Museum, Kabul, Afghanistan

SHRI LAKSHMI

Goddess Lakshmi is revered throughout India as the embodiment of good fortune and is best known in the Hindu pantheon as the wife of the Lord Vishnu. With no hierarchical cult of her own, Lakshmi is invoked for wealth and prosperity. Like the lotus motif, Lakshmi is ubiquitous in sacred Indian architectural relief. She appears on doors and lintels of temples to ward off misfortune and is integral to many rituals. She is seen here standing with each foot resting on a half-bloomed lotus while behind her appear a pair of peacocks. She also signifies knowledge and power besides fertility and wealth. Her gentle appearance with one hand resting on her breast, the source of milk and human sustenance, and the other holding a twig of leaves at the girdle just below the navel with a lowered face is suggestive of emotions of a mother nursing a child. This iconography of the ideal maternal female beauty is similar to the *yakshi* of Sanchi though carved in a more complex style.

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ca. 2nd century AD
Artist: Unknown
Sculpture in sandstone
Dimensions: 123 x 28 x 25 cm
From Mathura, Uttar Pradesh, India
In the collection of the
National Museum, New Delhi, India

DRUNKEN COURTESAN

The sculpture engages with the theme of futility of *kama* i.e., the pursuit of desires. It depicts a beautiful young courtesan with fulsome round breasts, drunk and tumbling down to the ground. She is supported by a young girl holding a goblet while a handsome youth helps her get up. The older woman, standing aside looks appalled at the drunken woman— symbolizing the futility of fleeting youth and beauty. The scene takes place under the Ashoka tree. The relief was excavated in the ruins of a *vihara* (Buddhist monastery) near Mathura. The co-existence of such differently oriented characters, one erotic the other ascetic, is typical of Indian religious art including Buddhism, which is known to accommodate such dualities of life, like the voluptuous *yakshis* (semi-divine spirit) on *stupa* gateways. On the reverse of this Kushana period piece, not visible in the image, is another relief which is said to be an illustration from the *Mrichchhakatika* or 'The Little Clay Cart', a well-known play in Sanskrit.

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ca. AD 200– AD 150
Artist: Unknown
Sculpture in sandstone
Dimensions: 101 x 82 x 39 cm
From Mathura, Uttar Pradesh, India
In the collection of the
National Museum, New Delhi, India

KANISHKA

The head and the figure of the sculpture were found separately from the Mat Shrine in Mathura region. It belongs to one of the Kushana rulers known to have commissioned their statues and set up royal galleries to display them. The portrait is inscribed 'Maharaja Rajatiraja Devaputra Kanisko'. Although there is no evidence to suggest that the head belongs to the figure here, it was one of those found from the same site, and resembled portraits incised on coins from the era. Large eyes, raised eyebrows, and a smooth contoured face seem to suggest that it is the head of Kanishka. The figure is dressed in stiff drapery with incised lines and beadlike hem that forms a triangular shape. A two-dimensional frontality pervades the silhouette. The sculpture is shown wearing padded boots and carrying weapons including a mace, which is resting on the ground and balanced by his right hand and a sword in the left hand, displaying an authoritative military power. However, the hat decorated with strings of beads and pearls appears sylistically closer to the original homeland of Kushana rulers (late 1st century AD-3rd century AD) rather than ancient India.

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ca. 2nd century AD
Artist: Unknown
Sculpture in reddish sandstone
Height: 170 cm
From Mat Shrine, Mathura region,
Uttar Pradesh
In the collection of the
Government Museum, Mathura,
Uttar Pradesh, India

SEATED BUDDHA WITH TWO ATTENDANTS

Conforming to early Mathura style, Buddha is seen here seated cross-legged in meditation on his *sinhasana* or lion throne. He bears several established marks of a great being—gentle smiling face, wide open eyes, palms and soles marked with his symbols of divinity: lotus and wheel respectively. Buddha's sensitively modelled masculine body draped in a transparent robe has a soft fleshy appearance with hair in a smooth tuft, elongated earlobes, and the right hand raised in *abhayamudra*, gesture of reassurance. Behind his head is a large halo. Two *bodhisattvas* (seeker of enlightenment or an enlightened being) stand as attendants, flanking the pillar and each holding a *chauri* (fly-whisk), which signify his royal heritage. The lions carved in high relief below the throne also indicate his royalty. The Buddha's iconography belongs to the early Kushana period when he began to be represented in human form instead of a symbolic one.

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ca. 2nd century AD
Artist: Unknown
Sculpture in sandstone
Height: 72 cm
From Katra, Mathura, Uttar Pradesh, India
In the collection of the Mathura Museum, Mathura, India

Rasa Theory

The basis of all key aesthetic concepts in Indian artistic tradition is the *Natya Shastra* (4th century AD), which is an ancient treatise that deals primarily with dramaturgy. Bharata is considered to be its author.

One of the most significant concepts it propounds is that of *rasa* or the aesthetic experience, which though well-developed in the *Natya Shastra* is the focus of much speculation by later aestheticians as well. To quote A. K. Coomaraswamy: 'Though introduced in the context of drama, the theory is, "immediately applicable to art of all kinds".' This perception of creativity as a holistic trajectory is promulgated in the story of Vajra who approached sage Markandeya with a request to teach him idol making for worship, and was advised to first learn how to paint, then to dance, followed by a basic knowledge of instrumental music, which necessitated a foundation in vocal music and an understanding of literature before starting to paint or sculpt. *Natya Shastra* and the interconnectivity of different creative arts, including painting, sculpture, dance, and music, is widely accepted as valid in Indian aesthetics and *Rasa* theory.

The basic premise of the theory of *rasa*, a word in Sanskrit that literally means flavour or juice or taste is essentially an aesthetic experience that arises in the viewer, caused by a combination of the stimulus and the emotional experience or reaction that can only be contemplated or suggested, and not described. The analogy that can be used to explain this complex idea is that of cooking where an assortment of ingredients, each distinct in itself, come together to produce a single, characteristic flavour. When applied to visual art and aesthetic experience, *rasa* signifies a state of *anand*— heightened delight or empathic bliss.

The *Natya Shastra* lists eight *rasas* and the corresponding basic emotion for each of the *rasas* is as follows:

- *Sringara* (the amorous/erotic) *rasa* is associated with the emotion of *rati* (love)
- *Hasya* (the comic) *rasa* is associated with *hasa* (humour)

Krishna, the butter thief, evoking *Hasya* (humour) and *Vatsalya* (motherly love), *Bhagavata Purana*, 1550

- *Karuna* (the compassionate) *rasa* is associated with *shoka* (sorrow)
- *Raudra* (the furious) *rasa* is associated with *krodha* (anger)
- *Vira* (the heroic) *rasa* is associated with *utsaha* (energy)
- *Bhayanaka* (the terrible) *rasa* is associated with *bhaya* (fear)
- *Bibhatsa* (the odious) *rasa* is associated with *jugupsa* (disgust)
- *Adbhuta* (the marvellous) *rasa* is associated with the emotion of *vismaya* (wonder)

The rhetorician and philosopher Abhinavagupta (AD 1000) is credited with introducing the ninth *rasa*, *Shanta* (tranquil); hence, the frequently used term *navarasa*, i.e., the nine *rasas*. According to him, '*pratiyamanaeva hi rasa*' i.e., *rasa* is the process of perception.

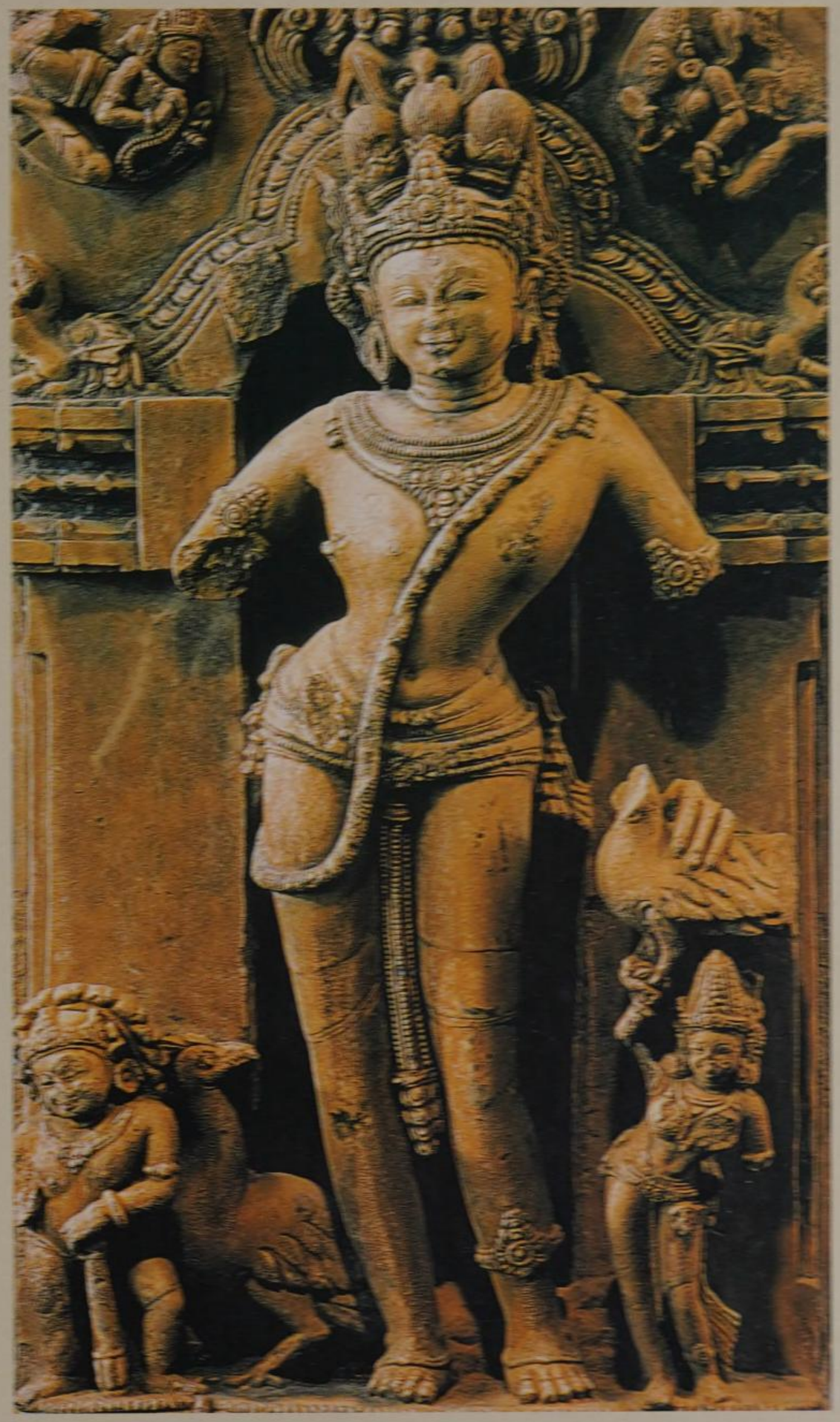
Shilpa Shastras

The term, *'Shilpa Shastras'*, refers to a variety of ancient and later Indian texts dated around the 5th century, that were meant to serve as instructive manuals for the *shilpins* (master sculptors who made religious idols), artists, and craftsmen. While the *Shilpa Shastras* described standards for religious iconography, the performing arts were elaborated in *Natya Shastra* dated a century earlier. The texts enumerate sixty-four different arts and crafts known as *bahya-kala*, i.e., external or practical arts, including architecture, sculpture, jewellery making, dance, music, medicine, and poetry.

The *Shilpa Shastras* were composed and compiled by a number of known and anonymous writers. The treatises deal with visual arts, and more explicitly with sculpture. The *Shilpa Shastras* prescribe proportions for images of both gods and mortals and list the distinctive iconographic elements of each deity that inform the artists of what are the auspicious and inauspicious marks. However, the most interesting aspect of the writings is the declaration that parts of the human body should draw on the forms of animate and inanimate objects. For example, the eyes must be shaped like a lotus or a fish; the shoulders of male figures must resemble the trunk of an elephant while their torsos inspired by a bull's face; and the shapely contours of a female must be shaped like an hourglass. These prescriptions were followed in true letter and spirit by the artists of ancient India.

The encyclopaedic *Vishnudharmottara* dated between AD 450 and AD 650 contains a significant section on painting entitled the *Chitrasutra*. The iconography is explained in the *Agni Purana* (8th to 9th century) with further elaborations in *Agamas* and *Tantras*. Later works include the *Samarangana Sutradhara* by King Bhoja (11th century) and Bhuvanadeva's *Aparajitapriccha* (12th century).

A major segment of the *Shilpa Shatras* is the *Vastu Shastra* or the science of architecture. It was the first major treatise, compiled between AD 500 and AD 700. The *Vastu Shastra* texts are architectural manuals that deal with town planning, construction of temples and residencies, and the selection of the site and rituals based on mathematical principles and astronomical calculations. They also contain advice on various aspects of architecture like the orientation and direction of a building, its best location, and size. *Vastu Shastras* also take into consideration the five elements of nature, i.e., earth (*bhumi*), water (*jala*), air (*vayu*), fire (*agni*), and space (*akasha*) in designing the building. Apart from containing the relevant terminology, *Vastu Shastra* describes types of buildings and even offers information regarding the rituals to be performed before beginning a construction.



Skanda-Kartikeya, Orissa, 13th century

KUBERA

Kubera is an ancient, indigenous corpulent divinity, chief of the *yakshas* (demi-gods) and guardian of all wealth—precious metals, gemstones, and resources found under the earth. As legend goes, this half-brother of Ravana, the demon king of Lanka, sided with Lord Rama against his stepbrother in their fight over Sita, earning him the entry into the realm of gods. Both Hindu Lord Ganesha and Jambhala the Buddhist god of wealth share with Kubera the pot-bellied look and the omen for prosperity though Kubera has a more mysterious and dark image. The sculpture depicts Kubera to be heavy bodied with his bulging stomach resting against his left thigh, as if burdened with the imposing weight. A simple fold of flesh connects his stomach to the chest, while his gently parted lips exude a sense of satiation and well-being. The obese figure is essentially an earth-god, which is associated with the fertility of the soil and its underlying mineral treasures signifying wealth and prosperity.

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ca. 2nd century AD
Artist: Unknown
Sculpture in sandstone
Dimensions: 96 x 45 x 35 cm
From Ahicchatra, Uttar Pradesh, India
In the collection of the National Museum, New Delhi, India

THE BODHISATTVA AS AN ASCETIC

The refinement in the execution of human anatomy in its bare bones is reflected in this Gandhara sculpture of fasting Buddha. This makes a clear departure from the classical style that reveled in delineating human form in accordance with the principles of balanced beauty and harmony. This dramatic image of Sakyamuni Buddha going through a period of self-denial in extreme asceticism, prior to his enlightenment provides a rare example of realism in Asian art of the period. The details in the execution of the starving Bodhisattva reduced to extreme thinness—his bony arms, visible ribs, the structure of the neck, the fallen cheeks, hollow eyes, wasted flesh of the body, and his overgrown beard—are all realistically depicted and contribute to the power that the icon commands. The spine visible through his stomach and other such elements offer an interesting contrast to the common image of Buddha absorbed in deep meditation in the image.

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ca. 2nd century AD
Artist: Unknown
Sculpture in schist
Height: 84 cm
From Sikri, Pakistan
In the collection of the Lahore Museum, Lahore, Pakistan

DRUM SLAB

Besides Amaravati, Nagarjunakonda was another ancient Buddhist religious centre in the Andhra region where a large *stupa* was built during the 3rd century under the reign of the Ikshvakus. This slab, which would have decorated the drum of the Nagarjunakonda *stupa*, depicts the very monument it was installed upon. The *stupa* shown is of the style typical in south India that has the *ayaka* platform surmounted by five columns. Below the *ayaka* platform is the gateway (there was one in each of the four cardinal directions), which is marked by four lions seated atop each of the entrance pillars. In the gateway, stands a *bodhisattva* figure surrounded by devotees who clasp their hands in worship. The railing coping is carved with the oft-repeated motif of running youths holding a garland. The profusely decorated drum slab of the *stupa* is topped with another railing and crowned with a garlanded umbrella. Above and around the slab appear flying celestials and lesser divinities in a celebratory manner, adoring the *stupa*.

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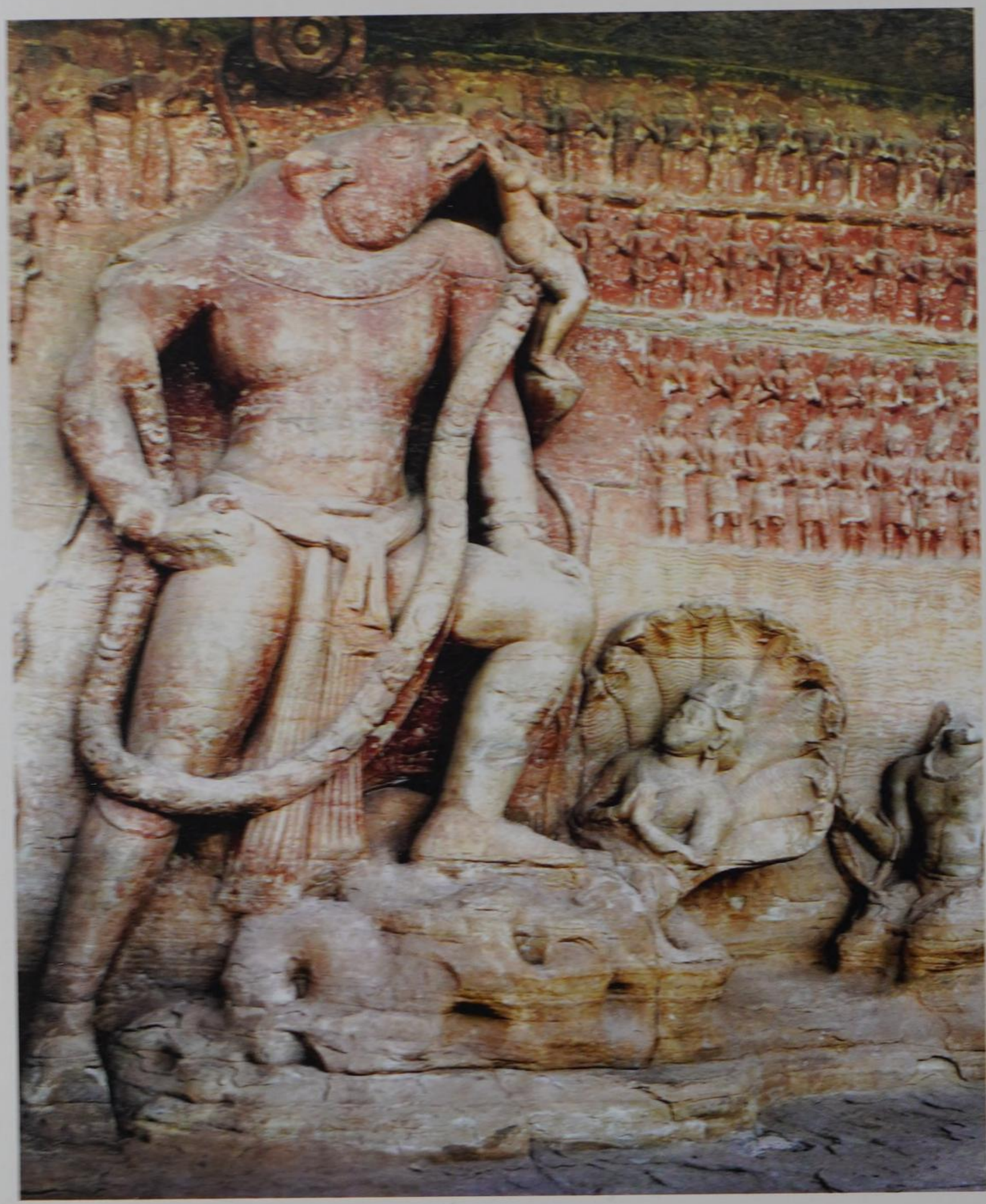
ca. 3rd century AD
Artist: Unknown
Sculpture in Cuddappah stone
Dimensions: 121 x 91 cm
From Nagarjunakonda, Andhra Pradesh, India
In the collection of the National Museum, New Delhi, India

BIRTH OF SIDDHARTHA

The legend about the birth of Siddhartha in various Pali and Sanskrit Buddhist texts essentially flows along similar lines with slight variations. In these depictions, Queen Maya is invariably shown standing in the Lumbini grove grasping the branches of a tree with one hand and holding her sister Mahaprajapati with the other as Siddhartha emerges from her side. In this sculptural panel, Lord Indra identified by his cylindrical crown is shown to hold out a cloth to drape the new-born Siddhartha while the man behind him with long curly hair is believed to be Lord Brahma. The other figures are deities and attendants. Particularly noteworthy is the drapery worn by the figures typical of the images produced in the cooler north western Gandhara region, which is distinct from the bare chest figuration created in the hotter climes of central India.

ca. 2nd century AD – 3rd century AD
Artist: Unknown
Sculpture in schist
Dimensions: 27.5 x 46 cm
From Gandhara, Indian subcontinent
In the collection of the
Museum für Indische Kunst,
Berlin, Germany



VARAHA, THE BOAR INCARNATION OF VISHNU

Amongst the largest and earliest sculpted compositions of the cave temples of Udayagiri is the magnificent relief panel of Lord Vishnu in one of his ten incarnations as *varaha* or the boar. In popular mythology when *asuras* or demons threatened to immerse earth under water, the *yakshas* or demi-gods pleaded with Lord Vishnu to save them and the earth from deluge and contamination and he assumed the form of a boar. In this extensive view of the cave, the relief carved into a shallow niche shows Varaha stepping out of cosmic waters. He suppresses the aquatic creature with his foot and carries Bhudevi, the goddess of earth to safety. She clings to his left shoulder while *nagas* or snake gods worship and sages line up on the either side admiring the miraculous act. The celestial creatures in incised wavy lines represent the ocean. The two great rivers are identified by their tutelary: Goddess Ganga on *makara* (mythical aquatic creature similar to an alligator) and Goddess Yamuna on tortoise. A circular lotus appears above the Varaha's large boar head. This Hindu myth like others has had multilayered interpretations that Asian art is known for. The then Gupta rulers were likened with Varaha, as the universal protectors.

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ca. early 5th century
Artist: Unknown
Carved stone relief
Dimensions: Colossal
In situ Cave 5, Udayagiri,
Madhya Pradesh, India

KRISHNA BATTLING THE HORSE DEMON KESHI

This moulded terracotta composition offers an interesting and lively counterpoint to the more grandiose display of other Gupta period sculptures in stone, possibly due to the easier pliability of clay. Young adorable Lord Krishna, who freed his people from demonic threats, appears here in an incarnation of Lord Vishnu. He is shown leaping forward dramatically to strike a kick at Keshi the horse demon's stomach and thrusting the elbow into his mouth. The tension between the boyish Krishna and his mighty looking combatant who had come with a mission to wipe out the god is evocatively displayed in Krishna's grinning face and grinding teeth, his steady gaze locked with Keshi's, and his muscular thigh, and *dhoti* or loincloth swaying with the move. The victor is, of course, Krishna with the horse's corpse lying prostrate below him emitting dung. The large terracotta plaque was possibly one of a series depicting scenes from Hindu epics displayed on the outer walls of a temple in Uttar Pradesh and is a graphic reminder of the importance of horse sacrifices in early Indian Vedic cult practices.

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ca. AD 440
Artist: Unknown
Sculpture in terracotta
Dimensions: 53.3 x 40.6 cm
From Uttar Pradesh, India
In the collection of the
Metropolitan Museum of Art,
New York, USA

SCENES FROM THE LIFE OF BUDDHA

The stele is a fine example of late 5th century art from Sarnath. The stele depicts significant stages in the life of Lord Buddha arranged in sequence from lower to the top registers. At the bottom, Queen Maya is shown dreaming in her sleep. Moving to the right, she appears standing under a tree as the newborn Buddha is received by Lord Indra. Baby Buddha is shown on a lotus pedestal given his first bath by two serpent deities pouring water with jars. At the second level to the left, he is shown discarding his royal robes and cutting his hair with a sword with his servants in attendance. At the right, he appears in a meditative mode, which is possibly a reference to his first meditation beneath the rose-apple tree. The third narrow register portrays the *naga* (snake) king Kalika and animals watching Buddha in awe as he walks towards the bodhi tree. The upper-most level portrays Buddha meditating in *bhumisparshamudra* with the gesture of touching the earth to the left and in giving his first sermon or *dharmachakraparivatana mudra* to the right. This installation seems to have been an object of worship at some stage.

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ca. AD 450 – AD 475
Artist: Unknown
Sculpture in sandstone
Height: 86 x 49 cm
From Sarnath, Uttar Pradesh, India
In the collection of the National Museum, New Delhi, India

STANDING BUDDHA

Buddha stands gracefully in a *tribhanga* (triple-bent) posture with a gentle turn of his left knee that helps sway his body along the central axis. There is a calm and introspective look on the gentle smiling face. His distended earlobes are sans earrings; his tresses curl as a sacred protrusion on his head; his eyes are closed in contemplation; and there is a halo with some floral motifs such as lotus. All these add an ethereal spirit to the image featured with his right hand in *abhaya mudra*, which signifies freedom from fear to the mankind. The body is adorned with a long, elegant transparent robe with no folds. It falls just above his ankles. This well-modelled sculpture shows his subtle body contours. The lower wear tied at the waist with a thin plain girdle is held at one end with a slight bend of the left hand. The refinement and austerity in the treatment of the form, which is different from the decorative characteristics of the Mathura school, endows this icon from Sarnath with a special sanctity and compassion.

ca. AD 475
Artist: Unknown
Sculpture in sandstone
Dimensions: Approximately 114 x 49 x 19 cm
From Sarnath, Uttar Pradesh, India
In the collection of the Indian Museum, Kolkata, West Bengal, India

BUDDHA PREACHING THE LAW

Lord Buddha is seen seated in a yogic contemplative posture preaching his first sermon. This sculpture is amongst the masterpieces from the Gupta period art workshop at Sarnath, which is renowned for its high relief sculptures on Buddhism—with narratives, philosophies, and ideals. Buddha is shown sitting in a deer park at Sarnath near Varanasi giving his first sermon to set the 'wheel of the law' or *dharmachakra* in motion. This gives the locale a special sanctity for all Buddhist religious and artistic activity, particularly during the late 5th century. The meditating Buddha with his peaceful look and half closed eyes raises his hands in the *dharmachakraparivartan mudra*, which is a gesture for teaching. The setting features deer and devotees under the pedestal and a wheel at the centre, as another reference to the first sermon. The sculpture has a sophisticated fluidity with an ornate halo of floral scrolls, which endows the work with a distinct spiritual ethos.

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ca. AD 475
Artist: Unknown
Sculpture in sandstone
Height: 160 cm
From Sarnath, Uttar Pradesh, India
In the collection of the Sarnath Museum, Uttar Pradesh, India

A MURAL PAINTING DEPICTING A SCENE FROM *MAHAJANAKA JATAKA*

The Ajanta caves are decorated with elaborate paintings on the interior walls and ceilings as well as large sculptures. These were used by Buddhist monks as *viharas* (quarters) for prayer and retreat. The mural painting in Cave 1 depicts the renunciation of King Mahajanaka of Mithila who is believed to have been a previous incarnation of Lord Buddha, as propounded in the *Jataka* stories. The dry fresco composition features the king and his beautiful wife Sivali who is attended to by her lissom maids. She is seen to implore him not to leave her. The city gateway separates this scene from the one at the right that depicts his departure from the palace and the city for a life of asceticism. Mahajanaka is shown mounted on a horse with a parasol, a symbol of royalty, above his head. He is followed by his attendants and subjects in the procession. The complicated spiritual story with people in motion is elucidated with spatial depth in this artistic rendering.

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ca. late 5th century
Artist: Unknown
Fresco in natural pigments
Height: Variable
In situ, Cave 1 at Ajanta, Maharashtra, India

BODHISATTVA PADMAPANI

The painting is of Avalokiteshvara ('the lord who looks down') or Padmapani ('the bearer of lotus') who is the chief *bodhisattva* (enlightened being) with immeasurable charity and compassion. He assists all living beings search for perfection and is shown here holding a blue lotus flower in his right hand in the midst of his devotees. This early example of a painting at Ajanta Cave 1 appears in a graded palette which features the gentle soul's glowing countenance and his richly attired and bejewelled form adorned with the sacred chord. He appears with half closed eyes in a meditative mode and long dark hair hanging below the ornate crown. The serene *bodhisattva* flanks the entrance of a cave and gazes downwards and is not distracted by the commotion depicted around him, as worshippers pass through on their way to the main rock-cut Buddha image at the back.

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ca. late 5th century
Artist: Unknown
Cave wall painting in natural pigments
Height: Variable
In situ Cave 1 at Ajanta, Maharashtra, India

BUDDHA HEAD

This Buddha head from Sarnath has few rivals that match its perfection. It is assumed that the head was part of a life-size icon. The round face with a prominent forehead, bow-shaped eyebrows over gently closed eyes, a beautifully curved nose, full lips, flat cheeks, and elongated earlobes displays a wisdom and meditative calm. The three lines across Buddha's neck, the head with its curled up hair neatly in place, and *ushnisha* (cranial protuberance), which is the emblem of his superior powers, display a mix of simplicity and design, which make this an eternally youthful and mysterious image. The quintessential Buddha imagery was developed during the Gupta period around 4th to 6th century. The iconic form which is noted for its beauty and grace has been widely copied and adapted throughout India and in parts of the South East Asia where Buddhism spread.

ca. late 5th century
Artist: Unknown
Sculpture in sandstone
Dimensions: 25 x 14.5 cm
From Sarnath, Uttar Pradesh, India
In the collection of the National Museum, New Delhi, India

VISHNU ASLEEP ON SERPENT SHESHA

The sculpted panel from a niche in the exterior wall of the south façade of a temple at Deogarh in central India portrays Lord Vishnu as per the Hindu myth. The four-armed Lord Vishnu is seen reclining at ease in a peaceful slumber. He is sheltered under the parasol-like hood of the many-headed serpent Shesha. Lord Brahma, the creator of the world, is shown sitting on a lotus emerging from Vishnu's navel. This indicates the birth of Brahma who then creates the world and the cosmos. The detailed carving on the panel makes this a consummate example of Hindu sculpture of the Gupta period. The lord is accompanied by his wife Goddess Lakshmi who massages his legs while the other present deities and demi-gods are shown busily engrossed in playing their roles in this dramatic representation.

ca. AD 500 –AD 525
Artist: Unknown
Temple sculpture in sandstone
Height: 400 cm
In situ at Vishnu Temple, Deogarh, Madhya Pradesh, India

SKANDAMATA

This sculpture of a mother with a child standing at her side is from a group of similar works found in the village of Tanesara–Mahadeva, in the vicinity of Udaipur, Rajasthan. The mother holds the plump child by hand and is trying to restrain his playfulness with affection. Her easy, relaxed posture and indulgent manner suggests an intimacy and a strong bond between the figures, making this to be a compelling representation of a mother and her child in Indian art, which has been likened to the best representations of Madonna and baby Jesus. In fact, the work represents a fine assimilation of the influences of the Gandhara-Hellenistic art with Gupta art. The graceful female in greenish schist with her fulsome breasts, curly hair, and clinging drapery presents a charming image that is said to represent Skandamata who is one of the six foster mothers of Karttikeya.

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ca. 6th century
Artist: Unknown
Sculpture in grey-green schist
Dimensions: 79.40 x 23.20 cm
From Tanesara-Mahadeva,
Rajasthan, India
In the collection of the
Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland,
Ohio, USA

SADASHIVA

This colossal carved statuary is that of Lord Shiva in his transcendent and awe inspiring triple-headed incarnation. It was found in Cave 1 at Elephanta island near Mumbai. There are three manifested and two un-manifested aspects of Shiva—a fourth face at the rear and a fifth one at the peak—that are said to exist in void and not formed. The central face is portrayed in iconic beauty and is serene but impassive and inscrutable. The left profile is that of Aghora (ferocious form) the *yogi* (one who practices yoga) who for centuries practiced meditation in the Himalayas at Kailasha. There are snakes winding through his matted hair which is decorated with skulls. He appears enraged as he fights *kala* (time), *yama* (death), *andhaka* (blindness), and other delusive elements. The right profile is that of Vamadeva who wears a quiet smile and has soft curls. The dreamy blissful face is because he is anticipating to meet with his beloved beautiful spouse Goddess Parvati. The complex imagery in basalt rock, which combines three different heads depicting distinct moods in a homogeneous bust, marks technical finesse of the classical baroque art of the era.

ca. mid 6th century
Artist: Unknown
Stone sculpture
Height: 3.3 m
In situ, Cave 1 at Elephanta Island, Mumbai, Maharashtra, India

Kamasutra

In classical Indian tradition, *kama* or erotic and aesthetic pleasure was counted among the four main purposes of human life, the others being *dharma* (virtuous conduct), *artha* (material prosperity), and *moksha* (liberation). The first and most elaborate treatise to survive on the subject of art and science of love and human sexual behaviour is the *Kamasutra*, written by Vatsyayana Mallanaga in Sanskrit in the 3rd century AD. *Kamasutra* is a guide to virtuous and gracious living. The seriousness with which the subject is treated is ascertained by the fact that the text was constituted along the lines of an earlier work, *Arthashastra*, which was a work on statecraft.

Contrary to popular perception, *Kamasutra* is not titillating or even sensual, the writing is, in fact, didactic and deals with the subject in a methodical manner. The compendium is divided into seven sections and composed of 1250 verses. The first section deals with generalities like the aim of life and its priorities. The second part lists the modes of amorous advances for sexual union and describes artistic sex positions. The third section gives hints on courtship. The other parts deal with marriage, courtesans, how to improve physical attraction, and issues like extra-marital relations. The book written as a guide for young urban men of the time, claims to help them attain sexual and emotional wisdom. The author professes that reading the text and the consequent knowledge gained will encourage temperance in a person's life. This will ensure that the aspect of *kama* does not infringe upon the other spheres of *dharma* and *artha*, and will lead to *moksha* i.e., ultimate release from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth.

Exterior walls of the Kandariya Mahadeva Temple with erotic sculptural carvings, 11th century

The watersports of Krishna and *gopis*, Kangra School, 1780-85 (below right)

KALYANSUNDARA

This beautiful rock sculpture from the Dhumar Lena cave temple at Ellora features the wedding of Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati. The beautifully chiselled and heavily ornamented figuration in the centre shows Shiva holding the hand of the beautiful and shy Parvati. To the right of the spectacular composition is seated Lord Brahma engaged in stirring up the sacred fire. Parvati's parents are shown standing beside her and ready to offer their daughter's hand to the god. Other assembled deities and celestials hover around the couple to witness the ceremony. The grace of the divine couple and the solemnity of the occasion is depicted with a masterly skill. This large sculpted wall panel is part of the series on Shaivite myths.

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ca. AD 550–AD 600
Artist: Unknown
Rock-cut sculpture
In situ, Cave 29 at Ellora,
Maharashtra, India

VISHNU SEATED ON SHESHA

The largest and most ornate of the early western Chalukyan cave temple art from Deccan is at Badami especially at Cave 3. This *in situ* stone sculpture is from the cave. Set into a niche on the left side of the wall at the end of the main veranda of the cave is the panel depicting Lord Vishnu seated on Shesha, the mythical serpent. The four-armed Lord Vishnu is seated in a posture of royal ease and is accompanied by his *vahana* (vehicle) Garuda, with its wings visible at the back. Vishnu appears in full form— a style popular at that time in the region. Vishnu's unusual headdress and multiple hoods of the serpent that shelter him as he appears surrounded by several other smaller deity figures are particularly noteworthy.

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ca. AD 578
Artist: Unknown
Stone sculpture
In situ, Cave 3 at Badami, Karnataka, India

BUDDHA

This late Gupta period sculpture depicts the combination of the Buddhist art traits of both Mathura and Sarnath schools that influenced the early medieval style. Although its provenance is unknown, the icon is believed to have come from Nepal where many such forms were transported in the 12th century following the wilful destruction of monasteries by invading armies. The bronze Buddha is marked for its delicate elegantly contoured form. The string-folds of his robe, his precise facial features, and flawless outline are particularly noteworthy. The iconic image of Lord Buddha that represents the religious fervour and aesthetics of the day was probably destined for a small shrine.

ca. late 6th–early 7th century
Artist: Unknown
Sculpture in bronze
Dimensions 47 x 15.6 x 14.3 cm
From India or Nepal
In the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, USA

Art in Medieval India

7th – 13th Century AD

Brihadishvara Temple, Tanjavur, Chola Dynasty, 11th century
Chakrasamvara Mandala Nepal, Early Kathmandu Valley style, Nepal,
early 12th century (facing page)

The most noteworthy development in Medieval Indian art was the shift from a predominance of rock-cut architecture and sculpture to more free-standing sculptures and paintings, particularly in the north, while staying rooted in religion and culture.

FRESCO PAINTING

Down south, the scene was somewhat different with gigantic rock-cut temples built by the Cholas telling their own tales and painting a different picture of fine craftsmanship in temple architecture, sculptures, and frescos as discovered in the ruins of Hampi in the Vijayanagara kingdom. The tradition and technique of cliff painting in India evolved gradually through thousands of years, starting with prehistoric art at Bhimbetka and ancient frescos preserved at the Ajanta Caves. There are significant examples of this at Bagh, Ellora, and Sittanavasal caves dated 8th–10th century. In 1931, the first Chola specimen fresco paintings were discovered within the circumambulatory passage of the Brihadishvara Temple.

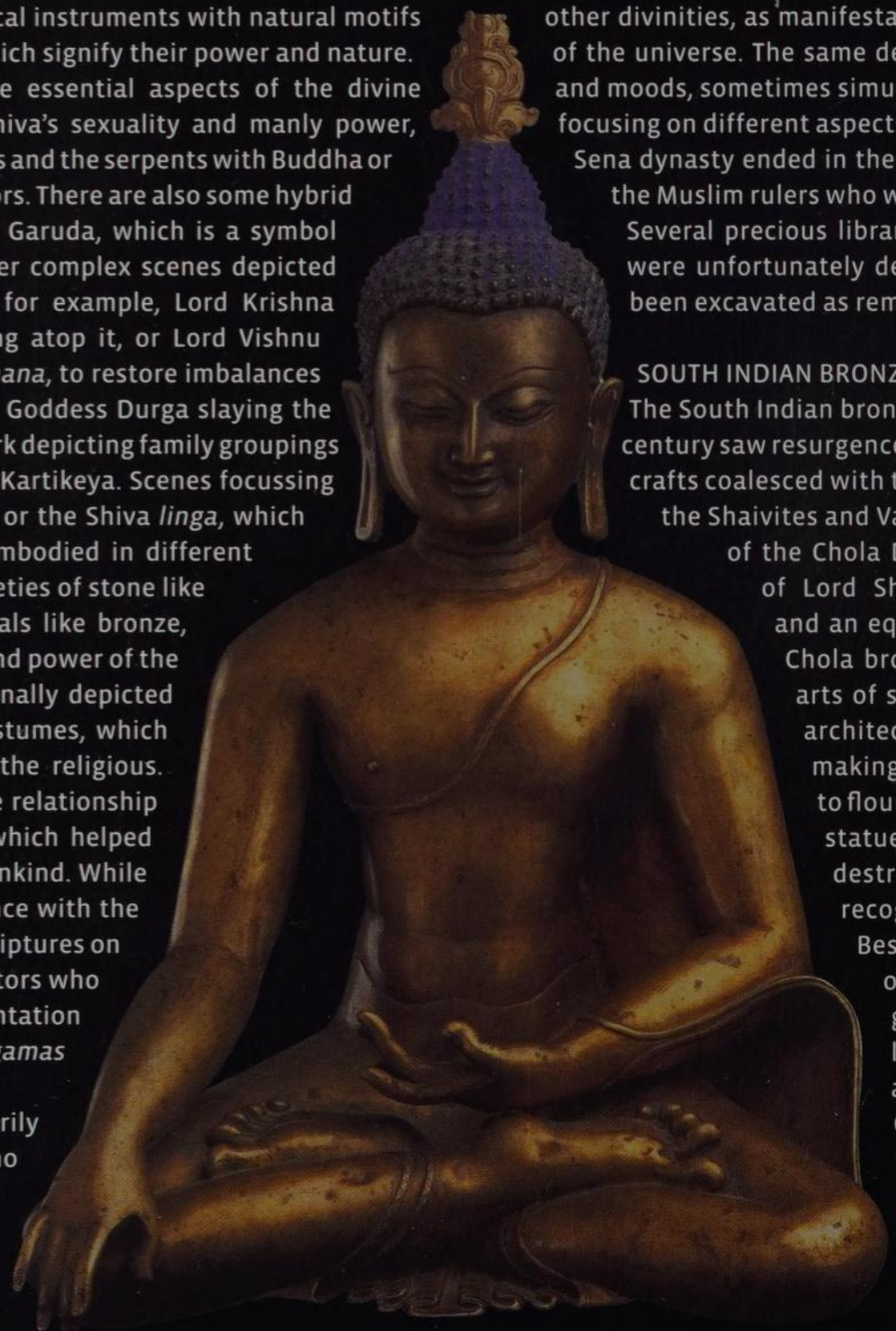
The technique used in these frescos involves applying a smooth batter of limestone mixture over the stones that takes a couple of days to set in. To allow the natural organic pigments to retain their inherent lustre, enormous paintings covering extensive walls and ceilings of the complex had to be completed within the short span of time before the base dried up. The Chola frescos were inundated with beautiful imagery of Lord Shiva since the rulers were ardent Shaivites. These, however, were painted over during the subsequent Nayak period. The legacy of the south Indian art of the medieval period, though with some variants, continued with subsequent rulers, i.e., the Hoysalas, Palas, Pratiharas, Chalukyas, and the Pallavas, as they all supported temple art given its appeal to the masses. Hinduism took into its fold basic tenets of Buddhism that was going through a decline in popularity in the country while spreading its wings in the neighbouring countries of Sri Lanka, Burma, Nepal, and Tibet. However, Buddhist art and Jain sculptures of *tirthankaras* continued to be cherished in parts of India, particularly in Gujarat.

SCULPTURAL FIGURATION

Interest in three-dimensional figural representations perceived as an embodiment of sacred beauty and spirituality continued unabated through Medieval India. According to the various *shilpa* texts and traditions, the God or the king must be muscular and broad-shouldered with a wide chest and a slim waist, the stomach should hang very slightly over the belt, and the limbs should be cylindrical which is suggestive of inward *prana* or breath. Female figures were modelled in graceful postures with chiselled features, heavy round breasts, narrow waist, ample hips, elaborate jewellery, and headdress. The figures are depicted with hands in varying positions; these gestures convey different moods and meanings. Inflexions were given to the body by tilting the central axis, for example, three different bends shown at the neck, shoulders, and hips depicted the distinct movement *tribhanga*. Seated figures are often featured in a lotus posture with feet turned upward and hands holding symbolic emblems. The multiple arms and heads of gods are indicative of their superhuman characteristics. Different *mudras* or postures evoke different sentiments which range from benign to fearsome, pleasing to provocative. Lord Vishnu is featured reclining on the serpent, while Nataraja is in a *tandava* dance mode. The uplifted outward facing palm of a figure bestows blessings and compassion while the downward facing one grants boons. Half-closed, downward-looking eyes, suggest meditation and the arched

bow indicates a demonic stare. The most exquisite representation of such 'perfected' figuration, which also embodies the principles of *Kamasutra*, appears on the walls of the Khajuraho temple. The temples and sculptures of Khajuraho have been treated elaborately in Devangana Desai's books *Erotic Sculpture of India: A Socio-Cultural Study* and *The Religious Imagery of Khajuraho*.

The gods and goddesses in Indian sculpture are identified by characteristic emblems like rosaries, water pots, musical instruments with natural motifs such as flowers, shells, and weapons, which signify their power and nature. Their *vahanas* or mounts highlight the essential aspects of the divine personality. Nandi the cow signifies Shiva's sexuality and manly power, Durga's lion expresses her aggressiveness and the serpents with Buddha or Jain deities play the role of their protectors. There are also some hybrid creatures such as Lord Vishnu's mount Garuda, which is a symbol of the power of the sun. There are other complex scenes depicted beautifully in sculptural installations, for example, Lord Krishna subduing the serpent Kaliya by dancing atop it, or Lord Vishnu churning the cosmic ocean, *amrit manthana*, to restore imbalances and rescue the world from disasters, or Goddess Durga slaying the buffalo to save sages. There is also artwork depicting family groupings such as Shiva with Parvati, Ganesh, and Kartikeya. Scenes focussing on specific incidents from Buddha's life or the Shiva *linga*, which is the symbol of procreation, are all embodied in different types of art and crafted in different varieties of stone like sandstone, marble, or granite and metals like bronze, silver, and brass. To reinforce the piety and power of the gods and goddesses, they were occasionally depicted as royals wearing crowns and regal costumes, which is a sign of the courtly merging with the religious. Ancient Indian sculpture reflects a close relationship between the theologians and artists, which helped to make gods more accessible to the mankind. While the priests set out the rules in accordance with the *Vastu Shastras*, which are the earliest scriptures on structural construction, it was the sculptors who transformed the iconographic representation of deities as per the *Shilp Shastras* and *agamas* into works of art.



Since art and architecture was primarily in the service of God, the artists who worked in guilds rarely signed their work. Traditions acquired through years of learning and practice were preserved orally via family units. These techniques were passed on from the father to the son and thus from one generation to the next. During the 8th and 13th centuries, the Pala and Sena dynasties ruled in north-eastern India, over present-day Bihar, West Bengal, and Bangladesh. These dynasties were responsible for unifying the regions culturally as they were great patrons of the arts and learning. This school of art has been comprehensively documented in well-researched works entitled *The Art of Ancient India: Buddhist, Hindu, Jain and The 'Pala-Sena' Schools of Sculpture* by Susan L. Huntington. Buddhist, Hindu, and Tantric mystical arts flourished in this period drawing pilgrims and students from China, Nepal, Tibet, Burma, Java, and Bali. This also helped in opening the trade routes with these countries. The demand for the work of highly skilled craftsmen belonging to the Pala–Sena School was great in India and the neighbouring countries. The figure was perceived by the artists as a representation of gods and goddesses, demons, and innumerable other divinities, as manifestations of the sublime creator and preserver of the universe. The same deity was depicted in multiple guises, roles, and moods, sometimes simultaneously, thus creating numerous images focusing on different aspects of *maya*, an illusionary manifestation. The Sena dynasty ended in the late 12th century after repeated attacks by the Muslim rulers who were already ruling over most of north India. Several precious libraries, images, and artefacts of the era that were unfortunately destroyed by the invading army, have since been excavated as remnants from mounds of the ruins.

SOUTH INDIAN BRONZES

The South Indian bronze image-making that had started in the 1st century saw resurgence during the 5th to 8th century, as religion and crafts coalesced with the beginning of mutual tolerance between the Shaivites and Vaishnavites. By 10th century, the dominance of the Chola Dynasty and their patronage and worship of Lord Shiva meant an intense sectarian revival and an equally forceful artistic revitalization of the Chola bronze genre, impacting in turn, the temple arts of south India. Artistic activity encompassing architecture, mural, sculpture, ceremonial image-making, lamps and carriage decoration continued to flourish in its varied forms. The exquisite bronze statue of Shiva as Nataraja, the creator and the destroyer of the universe is one of the most recognized Indian artistic creations of this era. Besides figures of Shiva; Vishnu, the preserver of the cosmos; his consort Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth; Sarasvati, the goddess of learning; Brahma, one of the Hindu trinity; and Parvati, Shiva's consort appear in Chola bronzes. The Chola bronzes achieve a perfect balance between technique and aesthetics. They were created using the lost wax technique called 'Cire Perdue', and elucidated in Sanskrit *shilpa* texts called *Madhu Uchchishtta Vidhana*.

EARLY ILLUSTRATED MANUSCRIPT PAINTING

The book painting tradition, associated with Buddhism and Jainism, pre-dates Islamic era. Early Buddhist palm leaf paintings and their wooden book covers, dating 10th century onwards reflect a style similar to the older wall painting tradition. With their modelled figures, these illustrated manuscripts are at a variance from the slightly later western Indian paintings that appear with a

Five cosmic Buddhas and four Vajrayana deities, Pala dynasty, 12th century (above); Vessantara Jataka, Pala style in Nepal, 12th century (below)
Shakyamuni Buddha, early Western Tibetan style, Tibet, ca. 1075 (facing page)

strong outline instead of the modelled forms of Ajanta frescos. In the subsequent two centuries, the technique for miniature format evolved further to adapt to a more refined line work, colours and plasticity. By the 12th century, even the Muslim dynasty-ruled states, liberated by the secular aura of the time gave up their insistence on non-iconic forms as Allah's tenet and began to patronize miniature paintings. Even the Rajput or Kshatriyas who were themselves invaders of India in the 6th century, absorbed the Hindu system in their art.

The 10th century Indian paintings on palm leaf manuscripts had no links with the contemporary life. The artists of that era painted Buddhist, Jain, and Hindu gods and goddesses and *mandalas* (a square with four gates in a circle with religious and ritual significance). The works which were solely objects of worship were revered and collected by the devotees who believed that the illustrated manuscripts were imbued with magical power. The Jain illustrated palm leaf manuscripts of the 13th century also followed a similar thrust. However with the introduction of paper, artists in western India got more space and freedom to experiment. They began to include in their compositions episodes from the lives of Jain *Tirthankaras* as narrated in the *Kalpasutra* and mythological stories like the *Kalakacharya Katha*. The Jain artists, whose main purpose was to tell a story as well as they could, began to occasionally add an ornamental landscape for beautification besides taking note of their environment. Towards the end of 13th century, the Turkish influence made inroads into Indian culture, which made the Jain painters more responsive to the changing scenario by including Persian elements in their border decorations and depicting events and people from the daily life, both Muslim and Hindu, besides forests and animals along with their religious idols as full page illustrations.

The scene takes a different turn, about AD 1000 with the arrival of Islam and in its train followed an iconoclasm and complex patterning derived from Arabic models and Persian miniatures. The styles brought by the Delhi Sultanate were not too different from the existing Indian art forms with both temples and mosques incorporating open courtyards. Assimilation and experimentation therefore was natural, as reflected in some of the new art and architectural elements that followed, including the domes and arches that became common. The story moves next to the Mughal era with their invasion of large parts of north India followed by introduction of their own traditions into the indigenous culture reshaping Indian art that entailed some Persian elements as reflected in the large repository of art and architecture of the subsequent period.

GREAT PENANCE RELIEF

The relief sculpture depicting the descent of River Ganges on the sea front at Mamallapuram on the outskirts of Chennai in south India is one of the nine free standing monolithic constructs. It features 150 life- sized figures, deities, animals, and other forms scattered through the site. It is a *shilpa prahelika* or visual puzzle, the answer to which hinges on the identity of the central bearded figure standing on one leg and performing rituals and feats of austerity. One version of the answer identifies the *tapasi* or ascetic as Arjuna, a hero from the epic *Mahabharata*. The visual here is linked to the penance he undertook to please Lord Shiva and obtain the divine weapon for his victory in battle with Kauravas. The other version sees Bhagiratha as the ascetic and the episode depicting his attempt to persuade River Ganges to come down from the heavens and purify the ashes of his ancestors. Cut by a narrow cleft on the vertical faces of two huge boulders, the multitude of figures and elements speak of two parallel though separate narratives while they have also been interpreted as an eulogy to the ruling Pallava dynasty, which was, said to have descended from the heavens just like the Ganges depicted in the relief.

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ca. AD 625–AD 650
Artist: Unknown
Relief panel in granite
Dimensions: 12 x 25 m
In situ at Mamallapuram, Tamil Nadu, India

SHIVA WITH NANDI

In this classic conception the slender body of Lord Shiva is executed in perfection and endowed with an inner spirituality. He is standing reclined on his mount Nandi, the bull, keeping his weight on the right foot kept elegantly to the right from the waist while he bends the left leg carefully at the knee in the *dvibhanga* or double-flexed posture. This rightward move of the body is shown to balance Shiva's shift to the left as the elbow of his left hand caresses the standing Nandi. The contours of his body with all eight hands in different positions appear strikingly lithe and harmonious while his handsome countenance with inward-looking fish-shaped eyes, small nose, and a decorative *jatamukuta* (crown), reveals a sense of calm and contentment. The work in one of the niches on the corridor wall running around the Durga temple at Aihole stands amongst the finest examples of sculptures of the Chalukya era.

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ca. Late 7th–early 8th century
Artist: Unknown
Stone sculpture
Height: Approximately 200 cm
In situ at Durga Temple, Aihole, Karnataka, India

VOTIVE STUPA

The votive *stupa* features the dome placed on a tiered square base with a niche on each of the four sides. An image of Buddha appears in each of the four niches. It is crowned with five *chattris* (umbrellas) at the top, which is a symbol of his divine status and grandeur. The hemispherical dome is a fine example of the structure derived from the earliest Buddhist monuments in India. It is a symbol of the continuing presence of Shakyamuni Buddha after his *parinirvana* (final transcendence) and a reminder of the path he had defined for his followers. Votive *stupas* such as this do not contain any relics and are sculptures made as acts of devotion or on fulfillment of a wish or vow at the expense and behest of a monk or a donor. Several such works can be found at pilgrimage sites in and around Bihar.

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ca. 8th century
Artist: Unknown
Stone sculpture
Dimensions: 78 x 44 x 35 cm
From Bodhgaya, Bihar, India
In the collection of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, UK

RIVER GODDESS GANGA

River Ganga is the most sacred of Indian rivers. Here it is personified as the Goddess Ganga, a beautiful young woman standing on the mythical sea creature, *makara*. She is adorned by big earrings, elaborate necklaces, armbands, headgear, girdles, and other ornaments. She looks sensuous with her fulsome breasts and stands with her right hip thrust to a side. Her diminutive female attendants appear beside her, one of whom charmingly stretches up to keep the parasol (now damaged) above the water deity. Her symbolic attribute—lotus flower—demonstrates her dominance over all animal and vegetal life. The water pot that she is often shown holding objectifies the container for collecting sacred water from holy rivers at pilgrim sites for purification. Since Ganga descends from the sacred Himalayas it is believed to possess a cleansing power that 'washes away sins'. Goddess Ganga is integral to the Hindu temple designs, appearing often in door-jamb decorations flanking the entrances to mark the transition from the mundane to the celestial.

ca. 9th–10th century
Artist unknown
Sculpture in red sandstone
Dimensions: Approximately 40 x 30 cm
From north India

CELESTIALS AND LION SUBDUING AN ELEPHANT

This well-preserved architectural fragment is probably from a temple and part of a larger installation. It has skillfully carved motifs of female celestials, animals, meandering foliage and other forms. The inner column rises from a moulded base with recesses at various levels. The foliage, climbs above the heavenly beauties seductively seated or standing in various niches. The central column shows a rampant winged lion trampling over a kneeling elephant with the front leg raised up in salutation. A *yaksha* or demi-god in the lower recess supports the structure above. The finely carved fulsome beauties, lavish swirling foliage, the playfulness of the lion, and the elephant motifs, display a distinct kinship with sculpture from Rajasthan while its composition and architectural features such as multiple surfaces and the contrast between the sinuous figural curves and vegetal forms reveal a Madhya Pradesh provenance. Hence, the attribution of the work is contested.

ca. AD 900
Artist: Unknown
Sculpture in sandstone
Height: 78.7 cm
From Rajasthan or Madhya Pradesh, India
In the collection of the Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena, USA

DURGA SLAYING THE BUFFALO DEMON MAHISHA

This work depicts a stirring mythological narrative of Durga, a ferocious *devi* or goddess, vanquishing Mahisha the buffalo-headed *asura* or demon. She is shown to spear through the demon with a trident, which she holds in her front right hand while her left front hand catches the demon's hair as he emerges from the buffalo's decapitated body. Aided by her mount, lion, who attacks Mahisha's haunches, she places her right foot on the rump of the beast, holding a thunderbolt, *chakra*, and conch in her other right hands and a shield, bell, and flail in her left ones. The goddess in skillfully composed details with her beautiful serene and detached appearance makes a powerful picture. The drama speaks for godly intervention to ensure stability of the world.

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ca. 9th century
Artist: Unknown
Sculpture in stone
Dimensions: 39.50 x 16.10 x 12.00 cm
From Badra, India
In the collection of the
Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio, USA

HARIHARA

The standing syncretistic deity combines two supreme beings: Hindu gods Vishnu (or Hari) and Shiva (or Hara), as featured in the iconography divided vertically. The right half of the Chandella dynasty sculpture displays the characteristic features of Hari and the left of Hara, suggesting a reconciliation between the two major Hindu sects—the Vaishnava and the Shaiva—and the ultimate transcendental reality of oneness of God. The awesome visage of Shiva with his matted locks is seen holding the *trishula* or trident in his hand, which befits his role as the destroyer while Vishnu appears calm, which is appropriate for his function as the preserver. Shiva's third eye is visible on the forehead while Vishnu wears a crown—each depicting his traditional attributes. Also featured on their respective sides are their varied incarnations and associates—Vishnu as Buddha at the top while elephant headed-god Ganesha, who is Shiva's son, stands on his side. The intricately carved ornate figures and forms that frame the stele give it a sensual animated appeal in a mix of the secular and the spiritual.

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ca. AD 950
Artist: Unknown
Stele in sandstone
Dimensions: 165 x 86 cm
From central India, probably Madhya Pradesh
In the collection of the British Museum, London, UK

PANEL WITH PEACOCK JATAKA

The rectangular frieze captures a kneeling man and two peacocks in the scene from *Mayura Jataka* ('Story of the Peacock'). As the narrative goes, the Bodhisattva born as the golden peacock lived in the Himalayan forests. The monarch of the region sent his men to capture the peacock but the divine Bodhisattva was able to elude them. The angry king spread a rumour that eternal youth would be attained by eating the flesh of the golden peacock. He and his six successors failed to capture the peacock but eventually the seventh monarch succeeded and the bird was brought to the king. The king however was so impressed with the peacock's beauty that he offered him his seat instead of killing him. The frame depicts this moment. The grooves and recessed flanges suggest that the piece was part of an architectural construct. The narrative panel is of considerable art historical significance as a rare representation in stone of the *jataka* tale of the Pala reign.

ca. 9th–10th century
Artist: Unknown
Sculpture in sandstone
Dimensions: 19.7 x 62.9 cm
From Bihar, India
In the collection of the
Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena, USA

THE HINDU DEITIES: BRAHMA, VISHNU, AND SHIVA

The *trimurti* or three-icon image is a potent Hindu symbol embodying the concept of universe in a cyclical continuum of creation, destruction, and regeneration. The trinity of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva is a triune. Brahma is the creator of the cosmos, Vishnu its preserver, and Shiva its purifier through destruction. In this Pala school icon all three gods are carved from a single piece stone and placed in separated frames with an arch at the top. Each is shown with four arms and hold their respective attributes. The figuration of Shiva and Vishnu appears almost identical except for their different crowns. Brahma, however, looks distinct with his three heads and corpulent body. The *vahana* (mount) of each deity is placed near his feet: Vishnu has Garuda in a diminutive human form with wings, Shiva has Nandi, and Brahma's *hamsa* or goose appears as the bull and swan respectively. The positioning of Shiva at the centre instead of Vishnu is somewhat unusual though.

ca. 10th century
Artist: Unknown
Sculpture in black schist
Dimensions: 57.15 x 69.21 x 15.24 cm
From Bihar, India
In the collection of the
Los Angeles County Museum of Art,
Los Angeles, USA

VISHNU AS VAIKUNTHA

The sculpture depicts Lord Vishnu in the three-headed *avatar* (incarnation), Vaikuntha, which is also the name of his heavenly abode. The face on the right is of Narasimha, the man-lion symbolizing *bala* or strength; the face on the left is Varaha, a boar representing *jnana* or knowledge, and the frontal face is that of Vasudeva Vishnu, signifying *sakti*, sovereignty. The fourth head at the back, not represented here, is meant to represent *kapila* or anger. Vishnu's two upper hands hold a lotus and a conch while his lower ones rest on the heads of his attendants: Gadadevi the 'club-woman' and Chakrapurusha the 'wheel-man', who bend their bodies sideways as they look up to their master. Along the edge of the stele appear Garuda and a guardian while in the scene above a rampant lion tramples over an elephant. An orb frame of pearls and a recessed lotus seem to have been added to give a three dimensionality to the iconic sculpture.

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ca. 10th century
Artist: Unknown
Sculpture in brownish-grey schist
Dimensions: 72.1 x 41.9 x 17.8 cm
From Haryana or Uttar Pradesh, India
In the collection of the
Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena, USA

QUEEN SEMBIYAN MAHADEVI AS THE GODDESS UMA

Goddess Uma, also known as Parvati, or the daughter of the mountains, is Lord Shiva's foremost consort. In this Chola metal sculpture she is featured as a slender sensuous beauty with full breasts standing alone in a triple bend or *tribhanga* posture. She is identifiable by her conical crown or *karandamukuta* with mountain-like tiers. With her left arm and hand down possibly in a dancing mode and the right hand poised in the manner of holding what might have been a lotus (now missing) she is elegantly ornamented, adorning a diaphanous lower wear secured with a belt. Conforming to the established iconographic conventions of the period and the religion, she was created using the lost-wax technique, which requires its own wax model that makes each piece unique. The bronze image was possibly part of a temple collection in south India. The rings on the base of the sculpture suggest that she was attached to the ceremonial chariot or palanquin and taken out for temple rituals and festival processions when required. She may have also been cast to eulogize the Chola queen Sembiyan Devi who was an ardent patron of the temple arts. This modelling of a royal portrait from a Goddess figure exemplifies the way in which the sacred and the profane or the divine and human merge in Indian culture.

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ca. AD 990
Artist: Unknown
Sculpture in bronze
Height: 107 cm
From Tamil Nadu, India
In the collection of the
Freer Gallery of Art,
Smithsonian Institution,
Washington DC, USA

KRISHNA SUBDUING THE SERPENT KALIYA

This bronze sculpture shows the young Krishna an incarnation of Lord Vishnu, dancing atop the demon, Kaliya, the black serpent. Kaliya is being punished for poisoning the waters of the River Yamuna at Vrindavan, terrifying its residents, and causing them much inconvenience. The playful Krishna standing on the hood of Kaliya catches his tail with his right hand and blesses the locals with the other. He places his right foot firmly on the hood of the serpent while the other is bent and poised in the air. The serpent depicted as half-serpent half-man is helpless, repents his misdeeds, and seeks the god's forgiveness with his hands joined in obeisance. The beautifully crafted metal sculpture is one of the early and most significant works of art from the Chola period.

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ca. 10th century
Artist: Unknown
Sculpture in bronze
Height: 59 cm
From Tamil Nadu, south India
In the collection of the National Museum, New Delhi, India

SHIVA NATARAJA IN *CHATURA* POSE

The much revered deity Shiva Nataraja is often cast in bronze in a variety of postures. Since the Chola period, he is worshipped all over India particularly in south India at Chidambaram temple devoted to *Nrtta murti*, the dancing icon of Shiva. In the specific posture known as *chatura*, the lord is shown dancing with both his legs bent at the knees. The right leg moves slightly to the back to take on the body weight while the left foot is posed with heels up and the toes on the ground forming a square. The four arms are equally gracefully poised, each in a different position. The front left arm is in a *dandahasta* or *gajahasta* position resembling the trunk of an elephant, the back left one holds a flame, the back right arm has his favorite *damru* (drum), and the front right arm is held in *abhaya mudra*, blessing mode. The dance is performed with grace and lilt to get rid of ignorance, represented by Shiva standing on the dwarf Apasmara.

ca. mid 10th century
Artist: Unknown
Sculpture in bronze
Height: 72 cm
From Thiruvarangulam, Tamil Nadu, south India
In the collection of the National Museum, New Delhi, India

BRAHMA

Lord Brahma with Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu form the Hindu holy trinity. However, he is accorded lesser importance and representation in art given the idea of formless absolute that he embodies. In this rare icon, Brahma's rounded body is enthroned on a lotus with his lower right leg resting on another lotus, a posture symbolizing his birth from the blossom. His *vahana* or mount is a goose, which is visible on the pedestal that is flanked by small worshippers. In the traditional literature, Brahma is described as a four-headed god, symbolizing the four *Vedas* and the four cardinal directions. As the high priest for performing rites of sacrifice, the ascetic adorns *yajnopavita* or the sacred thread, which hangs above his belly. His four hands hold *akshamala* or a string of prayer beads, *kamandalu* or a water pot, and a missing scoop and spoon for pouring purified butter into the sacrificial fire that were presumably integral to the sculpture.

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ca. 10th–11th century
Artist: Unknown
Sculpture in phyllite
Dimensions: 63 x 43 cm
From Bengal, India
In the collection of the
Museum für Indische Kunst,
Berlin, Germany

SHIVA ARDHANARISHVARA

Ardhanarishvara is conceptualization of a single Shaiva icon, which is half male and half female. The left part depicts Goddess Parvati and the right half is Lord Shiva. The execution of such a complex integration of the two halves with distinct physiognomy into a realistic, aesthetically pleasing image with philosophical layering, as represented here, calls for great artistic skills. The most obvious physical attributes are the rounded breast of the female and flat chest of the male half. Shiva holds his attributes– *trishula* (the trident) and *akshamala* (the rosary) in his two left hands and Parvati is seen holding a mirror. Shiva's third vertical eye is visible on his forehead while the diminutive Nandi appears underneath the figure. The imagery appears to focus on Shiva and his need for a female associate to propagate the universe rather than the idea of androgynous.

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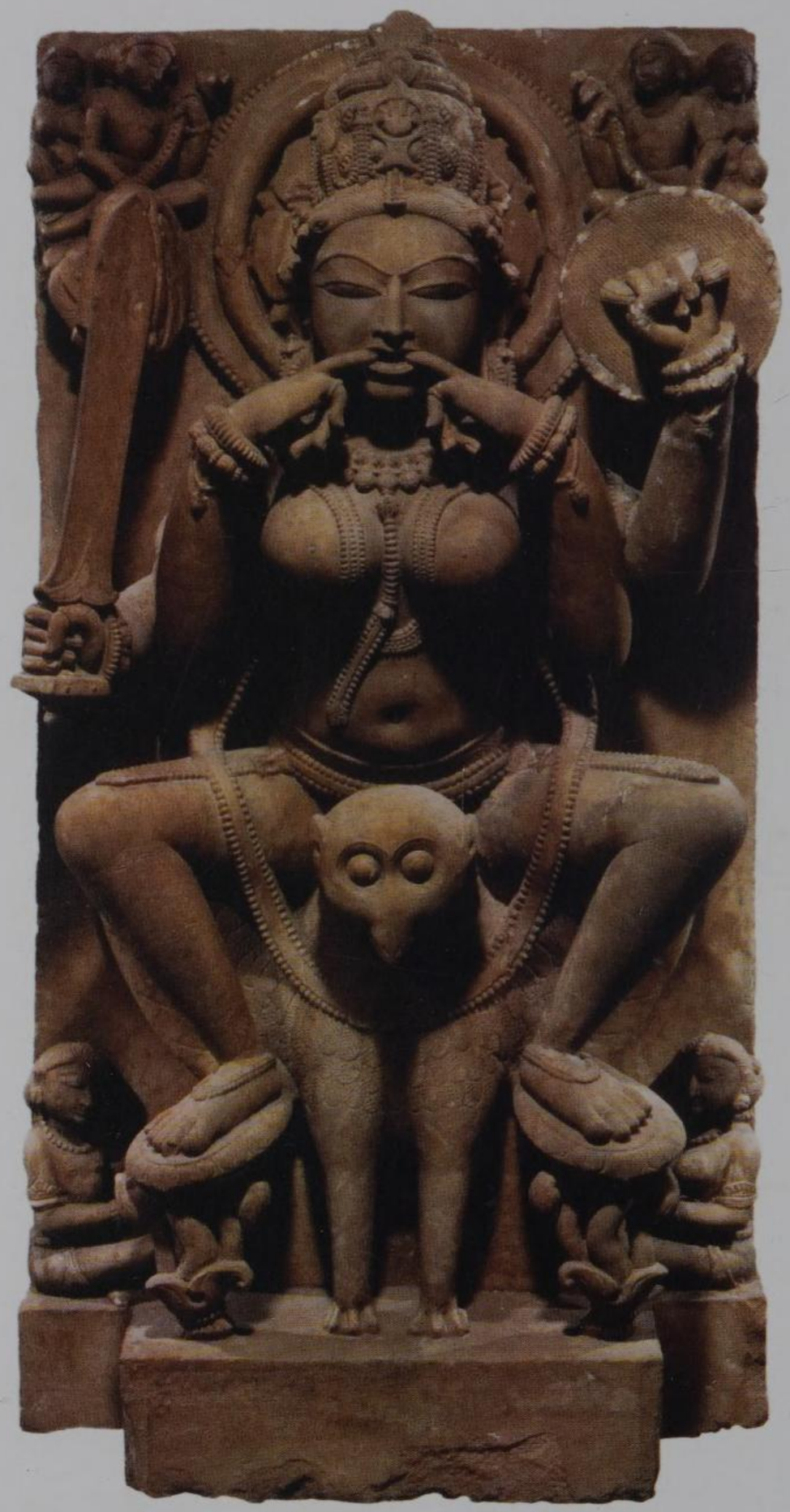
ca. early 11th century
Artist: Unknown
Sculpture in sandstone
Dimensions: 50.8 x 41.9 x 24.4 cm
From Madhya Pradesh, India
In the collection of the
Philadelphia Museum of Art,
Pennsylvania, USA



YOGINI

Yoginis or female practioners of yoga, such as this one, are followers and attendants in the retinue of Goddess Durga. Some *yoginis* are benign while others are ferocious and eerie. There is always a mystery surrounding their occult and ritualized sexual practices, often performed by the mythical demons in groups of eight or its multipliers. They are mostly featured on the inner walls of temple enclosures facing Lord Shiva. The four-armed goddess here is decorated with ornaments including a high, ornate crown. She sits atop an animal with her legs wide open on either side and feet resting on two large platforms held by her attendants sitting below on the floor. While her two upper arms hold onto her attributes—the sword and the shield—one finger of each of the lower two arms are placed into her mouth, a strange and obscure gesture which possibly indicates that she is intoxicated or engaged in a tantric practice. This voluptuous, seductive *yogini* with a chilling gaze was crafted during the reign of the Kacchapaghata dynasty and makes for an enigmatic creation of Indian art.

ca. AD 1025
Artist: Unknown
Sculptural panel in sandstone
Dimensions: 86.4 x 43.8 cm
From Kannauj, Uttar Pradesh
In the collection of the
San Antonio Museum of Art, Texas, USA

CHANDESHA RECEIVING A GARLAND FROM SHIVA AND PARVATI

This granite Chola period sculpture depicts the story of the young cowherd called Chandesha who used to worship and lustrate a mud *linga* (phallic symbol of Lord Shiva) with milk much against his father's dictate. One day the enraged father kicked Chandesha and destroyed the *linga* causing him to knock down his father. This pleased Shiva and Parvati who appeared to bless and garland Chandesha and he accepted their blessings with his head lowered and hands folded in *anjali* or reverence as seen here. The huge wall relief is part of the ornate exteriors of the temple that was built as a victory monument by the king, an ardent devotee of Shiva and who identified himself with Chandesha. The composition features the larger figure of Shiva as the central figure, while the other two, his consort Parvati and Chandesha are depicted in smaller size. All three figures and the attendant images are heavily ornamented to turn it into an exquisite work of art.

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ca. AD 1030
Artist: Unknown
Architectural segment in granite
Height: Approximately 150 cm
In situ at the Brihadeshvara Temple, Gagaikondacholapuram, Tamil Nadu, India

VARAHA, THE BOAR INCARNATION OF VISHNU

The myths of Lord Vishnu revolve around the concept of human dependence on god's grace and his preparedness to defend *dharma* or universal order. In this descent, Vishnu appears as the cosmic boar Varaha with a man's body who dives into the ocean to rescue Bhudevi, the beautiful earth goddess, from getting submerged into the destined cyclic turn. In this sculptural representation, Varaha stands like a warrior holding the earth aloft on his elbow while he crushes the aquatic serpents and the ocean demon by pressing them down under his raised foot. The celestial figures and the forms surrounding the deity witness the miraculous phenomenon. In this majestic victorious mode, Vishnu can be identified by his attributes — the mace, the discus, and the conch shell.

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ca. 11th century
Artist: Unknown
Sandstone sculpture
Dimensions: 78.11 x 50.8 cm
From north-central India
In the collection of the
Seattle Art Museum, Washington, USA

CHAMUNDA

Goddess Chamunda is one of the most fearsome divinities in the Hindu pantheon. She is associated with death and destruction and is frequently identified with Goddess Kali who is the personification of Goddess Durga. When Durga was threatened by the demons Chanda and Munda, Kali vanquished them and was identified as Chamunda. Chamunda is described in the literary tradition as the mother goddess or *matrika*. She is perceived to be an independent manifestation with no dependence on any male god except occasionally with Lord Shiva with whom she shares some attributes. Her shrines are located either on the battlefield or hill tops or in the outskirts of a village. She is depicted here striding upon her opponent, wild with rage. Her lean form is decorated with a chain of skulls, severed limbs, and serpents. In this late medieval cultic sculpture, she appears with pendulous breasts, large bulging eyes, and fangs visible through her large open mouth. The stele probably stood in the niche of a temple devoted exclusively to Chamunda symbolizing her powers to destroy the evils of ignorance.

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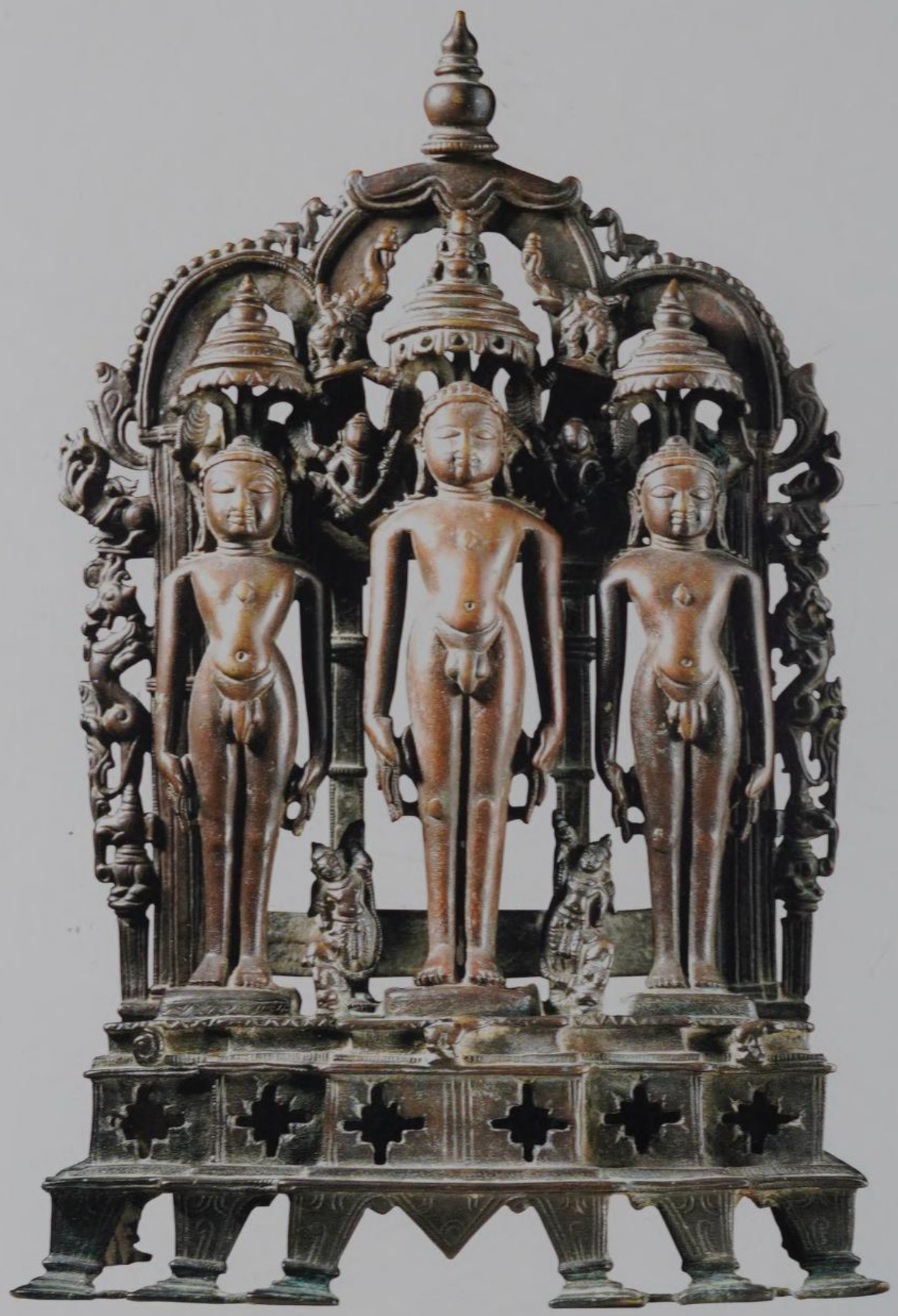
ca. 11th century
Artist: Unknown
Sculpture in brown sandstone
Dimensions: 83.5 x 52 cm
From central India
In the collection of the
Museum für Indische Kunst,
Berlin, Germany



JAIN ALTARPIECE WITH PARSHVANATHA, SHANTINATHA, AND VASUPUJIYA

The inscription at the back of the shrine states that the work was commissioned in the year 1120 by a merchant called Kundha and his son, Santana, as atonement for their *karma* or deeds. Since the three statues are sculpted as naked *jinas* or savior-teachers, it is postulated that the donors were members of the Digambara sect. The central figure of the triad represents Jina Shantinatha with his animal emblem—a deer—on the platform below. The conch on the right helps to identify the figure here as Neminatha. The third attribute that looks like a buffalo, suggests the third *jina* to be Vasupujiya. The finely crafted figures are sheltered by three parasols with auspicious water pots at the top. There are the usual *makaras* (mythical aquatic creatures) brackets and *gajashardula* motif (a motif showing a lion trampling an elephant) as well as garland bearers, musicians, elephants, and geese that lend animation and significance to the shrine.

ca. AD 1121
Artist Mahipati
Sculpture in copper
Dimensions: 33.02 x 20.95 x 11.11cm
From Gujarat, India
In the collection of the
Los Angeles County Museum of Art,
Los Angeles, USA

STANDING FIGURE OF A *JINA*

Jainism propounds belief in the twenty-four *tirthankaras* or *jinas* (savior-teachers), the conquerors who inspired and facilitated their followers to cross over from suffering and pain to inner enlightenment. This sculpture is that of the last *jina*, Lord Mahavira (ca. 540 BC–468 BC) who is believed to have been a contemporary of Lord Buddha. The standing *tirthankara* is shown in a meditative position of abandoning the body known as *kayotsarga*. The erect and symmetrical body has wide shoulders and broad chest tapering at a narrow waist and full stomach, which expands with each sacred breadth or *prana*. The body weight is distributed evenly on unbent legs set firmly on the ground with feet planted slightly apart with hands hanging on the sides. The hands are kept a little away from the body. The distinct composition of masterfully controlled contours of the figure with the face that radiates detached serenity seems poised to give compassionate sermons.

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ca. 11th century
Artist: Unknown
Sculpture in buff sandstone
Dimensions: 96 x 35 x 12 cm
From Madhya Pradesh, India
In the collection of the
Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology,
Oxford, UK

COUPLE WITH ATTENDANTS

The erotic sculpture of a copulating pair being assisted in the act by attendants is from the southern exterior wall of the largest and most beautiful temple, Kandariya Mahadeva, at Khajuraho. It enshrines a *linga* four feet in circumference. It is built on an elevated substructure, over which comes the richly decorated building. Its *jangha* or juncture is covered with numerous sculpted panels like open galleries. The highly stylized amorous figures speak of the principles of *Vastu Shastra* merging with *Kamasutra* as the sculpture projects an interface between the sacred and the profane. The male at the centre is shown in the *shirshasana* or yogic posture of standing head-down. The imaginary grid created in the sculpture is a triangular *yantra*, which is a geometric interpretation of the tantric symbol of Shiva and Shakti or the union of male and female. This *mithuna* or copulation scene carved on the temple façades is also meant to ward off evil spirits.

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ca. 11th century
Artist: Unknown
Sculptural panel in sandstone
In situ at the Kandariya Mahadeva Temple,
Khajuraho, Madhya Pradesh, India

NATARAJA

The walls of the Brihadeshvara temple have representations of Lord Shiva in many different forms, including the Nataraja, which is his most majestic and popular *avatar* (incarnation). The graceful contours of the god, delicately ornamented, add a charm to this sculptural interpretation. Nataraja who is associated with both creation and destruction and appears at the end and the beginning of the cosmic cycle is shown with his two upper hands holding the fire and the drum. He is seen performing the *ananda-tandava*, the dance of furious bliss. He is standing on his bent right leg as the left one is lifted to the waist level. One of his four arms crosses the body in the gesture of *gajahasta* or 'elephant-hand', appearing relaxed. Shiva places one of his right hands in *abhayamudra* (open-palm gesture) while his matted tresses stream upwards along with the garlands. Goddess Kali, the three-legged mythical devotee Bhringi, Karaikal Ammaiyar, and Shiva-*gana* (the dwarf followers of Shiva) are also featured on the temple wall.

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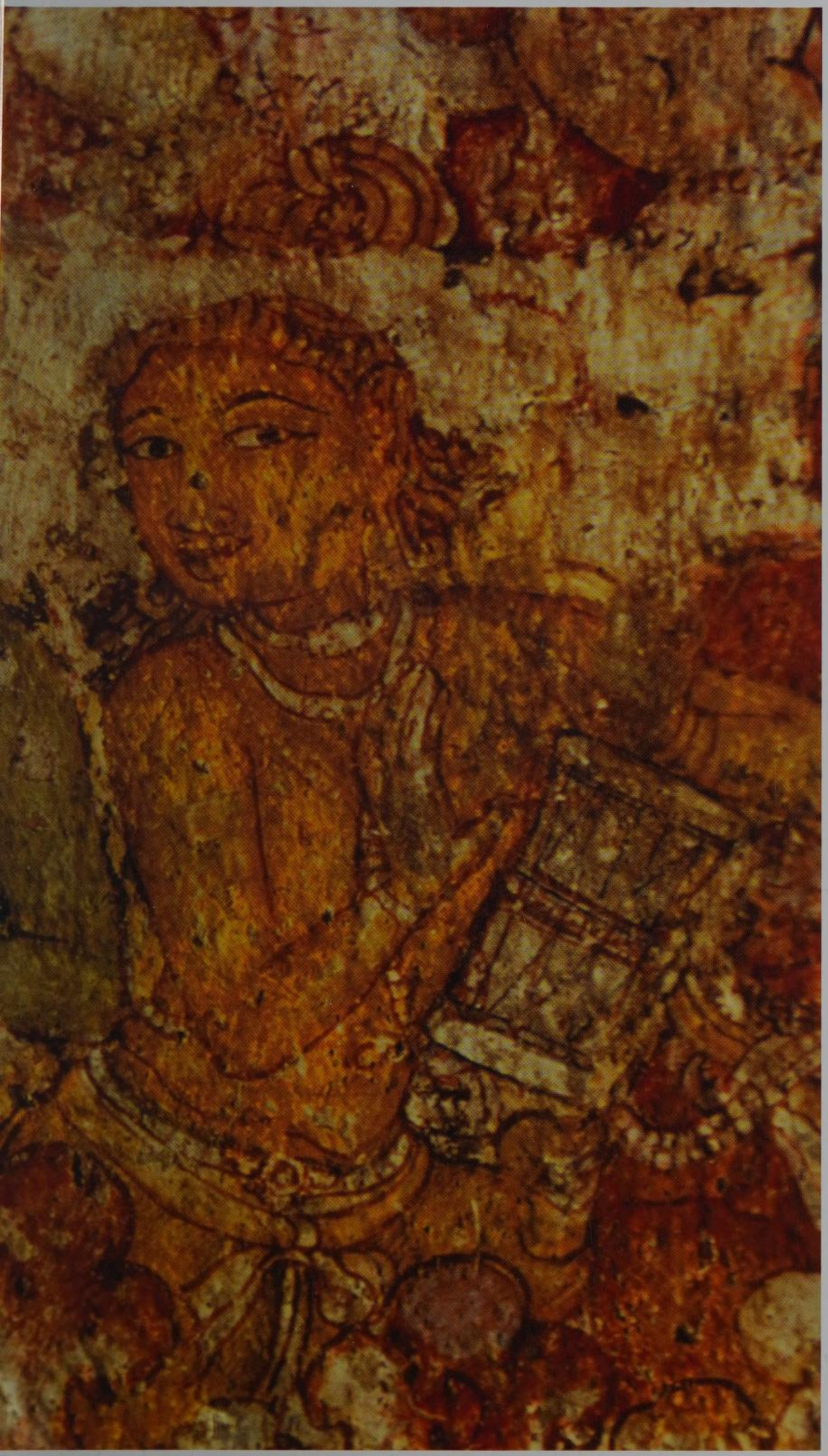
ca. 11th century
Artist: Unknown
Sculpture in stone
Height: Approximately 220 cm
In situ at the Brihadeshvara Temple,
Gangaikondacholapuram,
Tamil Nadu, India



DANCING GIRLS

This temple mural is renowned for its exquisite quality and Tanjore painting technique, the like of which is not found elsewhere in India. The mural depicts decked up voluptuous, beautiful maidens (possibly temple dancers) in different postures and stages of animation. They present an image of celestial celebration and sensuousness. There is a large expanse of mineral pigments applied on damp plaster with contours drawn in light red and the body in golden yellow. The edges are reinforced in black with limited signs of any retouching endowing the fresco its distinct colouration. The Brihadeshvara temple at Tanjore marks the Chola king Rajaraja's conquest over the late Chalukyas. It has a wide circumambulatory passage divided into fifteen chambers, twelve of which are covered with wall paintings. In some of the chambers, paintings drawn at a later period have broken away in places to reveal an earlier layer, an original part of the decoration of the Brihadeshvara to which these dancing girls belong.

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ca. AD 1100
Artist: Unknown
Fresco
In situ at the Brihadeshvara Temple,
Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu, India

GODDESS CEILING PANEL

Located in the sacred city of Mount Abu and a part of the famous Jain temple, Vimala Vasahi Temple, the panel eulogizes Lord Mahavira who extolled the virtues of non-violence and charity. Jainism since its beginning in the 6th century BC has been particularly popular amongst the merchant communities of western India. They commissioned elaborate temples, illustrated manuscripts, and statutory of their saints for atonement and to help promote the religion. In this intricately carved marble panel, the ceiling is inundated with filigree and figures of gods, goddesses, dancers, and geometric forms. The six-armed Vidyadevi, the goddess of wisdom and knowledge, appears in an imposing form at the centre. The panel also includes features that link her to Hindu Goddess Chakreswari, as she holds the *chakra* or discus in her upper right hand while the snake and Garuda link her with Goddess Vaishnavi, the female embodiment of Vishnu. The *vajra* or thunderbolt that she holds suggests her tantric associations. Her beautifully chiselled, proportionate form is heavily ornamented and she is surrounded by numerous attendants, including demi-gods and celestials besides her devotees evoking an aura of devotion and grandeur.

ca. AD 1150
Artist: Unknown
Architectural segment in marble
Dimensions: 122 x 213 cm
In situ at the Vimala Vasahi Temple,
Mount Abu, Rajasthan, India

SHANTINATHA ALTARPIECE

Shantinatha is a revered figure in Jain pantheon. The 16th *jina* or saviour-teacher is credited with reviving Jainism at a time when it was nearing extinction. He is invoked by the devotees to avert calamities and ensure peace as propounded by his name—*shanti* for peace and *natha* for lord. The monumental bronze image bears an inscription dating it to the year of Vikrama-Samvat 1224 (AD 1168). The Solanki dynasty composition in three sections includes the *prabhavali* or radiating halo that supports the fly-whisk bearers, celestial attendants, elephants, and musicians paying homage to the naked *jina*. He is seated on a jewelled cushion in a *padmasana* yogic posture. The beautifully modelled figure displays a serene calm face, finely crafted hands and feet, and the auspicious *srivatsa* mark on the chest. His eyes look straight ahead. They were probably set once with precious stones or crystals, which are now missing though the silver and copper inlay on the base of *jina's* throne are intact. The glow of the burnished alloy in the stillness of Shantinatha's meditative posture offers a contrasting aura of the buzzing scene around the altar.

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ca. AD 1168
Artist: Unknown
Sculpture in bronze and silver
Height: 117 cm
From western India, probably Gujarat or Rajasthan
In the collection of the
Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK

CHATURMUKHALINGA

The *lingu* is an abstract sign of Lord Shiva in phallic form. It is often carved in oval shaped stone and indicates his erect phallus and embodies the god's potency. Chaturmukhalinga or four-faced *lingu* with each face facing a different direction indicates the omnipresence of Shiva. The *lingu* is also perceived in the context of the five elements—earth, water, wind, fire, and space, the last one alluded to by its invisible face, which is imagined to be at the top of the sculpture. The lower cubic part of the sculpture was probably placed below the ground. The intermediate octagonal zone with its eight sides points to eight directions of the horizontal space. In the early period, the *lingu* stone was placed outdoors on a raised platform under trees. Later with the development of temples the abstract phallic form was provided with a human face to help devotees comprehend Shiva's magnitude.

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ca. 11th–12th century
Artist: Unknown
Sculpture in black schist
Dimensions: 34.7 x 10.2 cm
From northern or central India
In the collection of the Brooklyn Museum, New York, USA

THREE ILLUSTRATED PALM LEAVES FROM *PRAJNAPARAMITA*

The three palm leaves are part of a rare surviving important illustrated manuscript *Astasahasrika Prajnaparamita* Sutra ('The Perfection of Wisdom'). It is part of the canonical *Buddhist Sutra*, which is the central text of the Mahayana Prajnaparamita School. The images are placed in the middle of the manuscript with *mandalas* (a square with four gates in a circle with religious and ritual significance), drawn and painted in the centre for magical and protective purposes. The palm leaves contain 800 verses on philosophy. It is a work of pure metaphysics, making it difficult for narrative illustration. Only around AD 1000, the images of tantric or Vajrayana Buddhism divinities were added. Many such illuminated manuscripts found in Buddhist monasteries and associated frescos and banners were destroyed by Muslim invaders. However, Buddhist culture, its art and spirit, fortunately continued to survive in the Tibetan monasteries.

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ca. 11th–12th century
Artist: Unknown
Palm leaf manuscript in opaque watercolours and ink
Dimensions: 6.4 x 32.4 cm each
From eastern India
In the collection of the Brooklyn Museum, New York, USA

KARAIKKAL AMMAIYAR

The female ascetic is seated cross-legged on the rectangular bronze pedestal. She has a large head with the hair combed back, sunken neck, fanged teeth, protuberant nose, pointed ears, wrinkled face, and bare breasts. She is seen holding a pair of cymbals. She was a devout follower of Lord Shiva and was a renowned figure of the 6th century Tamil literature. The lean-limbed figure, appears in a state of total absorption. She is the revered mother Ammaiyar from Karaikkal whose birth name is Punithavati. She is one of the sixty-three Nayanmars or Shivaite followers. Ammaiyar was married at an early age. Her husband left her seeing her ardent devotion to Shiva. She requested Shiva to take away her useless beauty. Her request was finally granted. Thereafter she is believed to have lived at Tiruvalangadu, the spot where Shiva out-danced the fearsome Goddess Kali.

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ca. 12th century
Artist: Unknown
Sculpture in bronze
Dimensions: 49.85 x 22.54 x 13.97 cm
From Tamil Nadu, India
In the collection of the
Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art,
Kansas City, USA

SHIVA NATARAJA

This sculpture from the Chola period depicts Shiva Nataraja, the lord of dance, performing *ananda tandava*, the dance of bliss. It was possibly created for worship in a domestic shrine. Taking the form of *bhiksatana*, the wandering ascetic, Nataraja tests *rishis* (sages), who attempted to attack him by creating a tiger, then a serpent, and finally a dwarf, each of whom Shiva won over. The dance that he performed with his left leg thrust upwards across his body represents the three evils of untamed mind, egoism, and ignorance that sages must overcome to free themselves from their beastly nature and hence the cycle of rebirth. His arms are shown to hold his various attributes as he adorns the defeated snake and other ornaments while his *jatas* (locks of long hair), flow outward, representing the River Ganga. The rim of fire in the setting signifies purification during cremation. The work like many others of Indian art entails an interesting narrative with an intricate assemblage of philosophical concepts and ideas.

ca. Late 12th–early 13th century
Artist: Unknown
Sculpture in copper alloy
Dimensions: 65.4 x 55.9 x 19.7 cm
Tamil Nadu, India
In the collection of the
Metropolitan Museum of Art,
New York, USA

NANDI BULL

The humped bull, Nandi, is the mount of Lord Shiva and is represented in Indian art as a signifier of his presence. Nandi is usually placed in the pavilion of temples dedicated to Shiva. As in most cases, the sculpted animal figure appears dignified with his legs along with his tail tucked under the body, his head raised attentively, eyes half closed, and ears standing up in a meditative manner. The garlands, intricate jewellery, bells, and other motifs carved in crisp filigree work augment the majestic appearance of the well-modelled animal. Despite the colossal monumentality, masculinity, and the rage that the bull embodies, the image is marked for its gentle and placid appearance.

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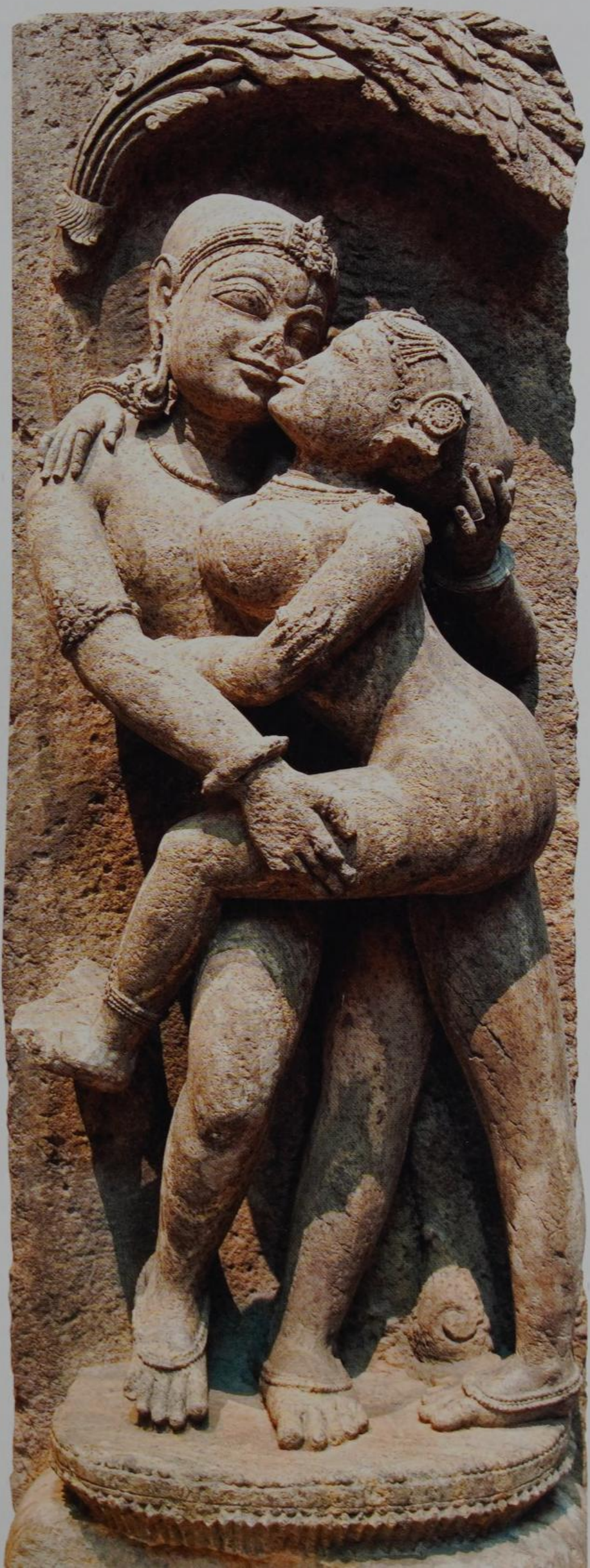
ca. 12th century
Artist: Unknown
Sculpture in stone
In situ at Hoysaleshwara Temple, Helebid, Karnataka, India



LOVING COUPLE

This large and intensely carved *mithuna* or loving couple with heavy limbs and abundant flesh appears as a stand-alone sculpture independent of any back slab. It was once a part of a subsidiary decoration of a temple façade probably at Puri. The bejewelled intertwined couple with graceful curvaceous figures stand on a lotus base under a canopy of leaves. They appear self-absorbed in love making and gaze into each other's eyes. The rectangular relief shows naked, beautiful bodies with detailed features in a rapturous embrace. Their erotic posture is typical of architectural sculptures in Hindu temples of 13th-century Orissa. The temple was regarded as central axis of the world meant to convey multiple meanings. From an open celebration of physical pleasures through myriad reliefs on the outer walls to the more metaphorical symbolism of the soul's longing for union with the divine, represented by holy forms and deities placed in *grabhagriha* (temple interiors), Indian religious art mirrors it all.

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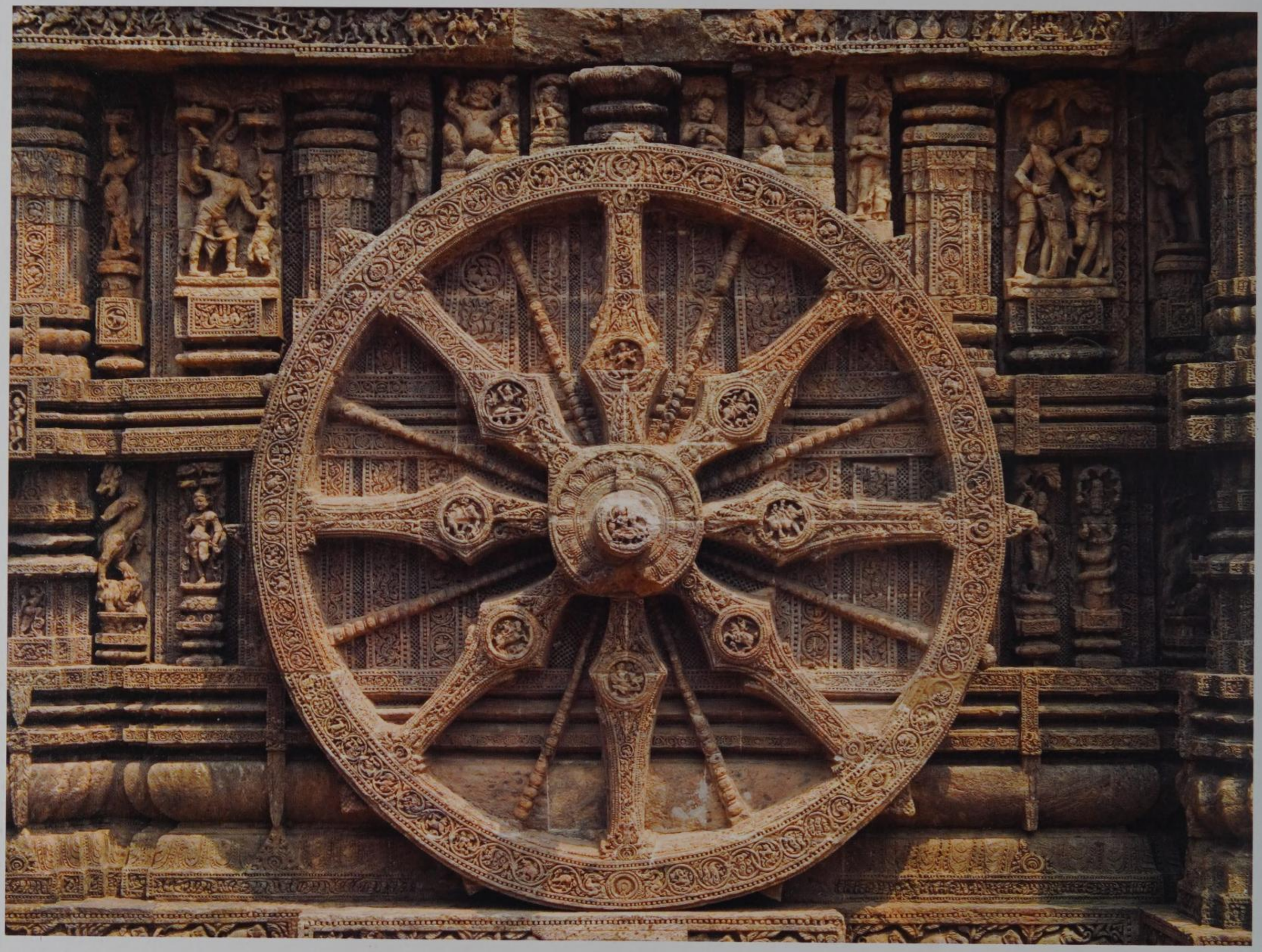
ca. 13th century
Artist: Unknown
Sculpture in ferruginous stone
Height: 182.9 cm
From Orissa, India
In the collection of the
Metropolitan Museum of Art,
New York, USA



SUN TEMPLE CHARIOT WHEEL

This is one of the twelve pairs of intricately ornamented wheels on the plinth of the gigantic chariot of Surya or the Sun God, pulled by seven pairs of horses, as carved at the temple in Konark. It was built during the reign of Narsimhadeva I in the 13th century. It entails detailed carvings in its eight major and eight minor spokes. The wheel sports decorative motifs and figures, each relating to a particular sign of the zodiac. The twelve pairs of wheels refer to the twelve months of the year and to the lunar calendar. The Hindu mythological texts also describe devotional ceremonies associated with each pair of the wheels at the appropriate time of the day and the month. Beneath the wheel around the plinth is a frieze featuring a band of tiny elephants in procession (not visible here). The grand temple conceived on a monumental scale makes it the tallest 13th century temple in India. It has a special sanctity as a popular religious centre, which is unfortunately in some decay today.

ca. AD 1238–AD 1264
Artist: Unknown
Sculpture in sandstone
Dimensions: Approximately 10 feet in diameter
In situ at the Sun Temple, Konark, Orissa, India

KALACHAKRA

This fresco from the Alchi Monastery in Ladakh represents Tibetan Buddhist painting tradition, which is different from other Indian art styles. It depicts the deity Kalachakra, which literally means 'time-wheel'. The mural depicts Kalachakra and his consort amidst flames, which is one of the most striking motifs in the art of the region. Sexual union is its main focus. The format depicts a protagonist surrounded by smaller figures in a formulaic and stylized manner and painted in natural and mineral pigments in this frieze. As per Mahayana Buddhism, *prajna* or wisdom is represented by the female. She must be combined with *upaya* or the means which is personified by her male partner to achieve *shunyata* or nothingness— a pre-requisite for enlightenment. The wall painting is a visualization of this metaphysical ideal of sexual union that Kalachakra principle also echoes.

ca. AD 1275
Artist: Unknown
Height: 100 cm
Fresco
In situ at Lhakhang Soma, Alchi Monastery, Ladakh, India

Art in Later Medieval India

14th – Mid 18th Century

Krishna dallying with *gopis*, from a *Gitagovinda* manuscript, Basohli School, 1730
Head of the courtier Iltifat Khan, Mughal School, 1640 (facing page)

The cultural history of India is documented in the arts of different epochs and mirrored in myriad forms of painting, sculpture, architecture, and artefact that were produced under different dynasties and religious affiliations. In the north, the Rajputs dominated the scene while the Islamic traditions spread successfully beyond Delhi and central India. In the south, the Hoysala, Sangama, and other regional dynasties firmly stood their ground, commissioning magnificent religious and secular art and architecture that dots most of south India.

The Rajput and Mughal rulers' love and fondness for arts and opulence is evidenced by the large repository of miniature paintings, palaces, forts and decorative arts produced during the 400 years of their rule. The ground was set by Babur. The Mughal rule over parts of the country brought political consolidation accompanied by cultural, social, and economic developments. The large murals and paintings that had dominated the scene in western and central India during the first millennium changed at the beginning of the second millennium with the advent of miniature painting that had featured initially as illustrations etched on palm leaf manuscripts based on Buddhist and Jain themes. A similar change was witnessed on the architectural horizon with grand palaces and forts replacing *stupas*. The Mughal expertise in painting, illuminated manuscripts and books, calligraphy, architectural design, the concept of *bag-e-bahisht* or *char-bagh*, i.e., the image of the garden of paradise, inlay work, carvings, adornments and fondness for grandeur and good things of life, influenced the indigenous arts while simultaneously taking into its fold some of the prevalent local elements such as *Jali* work or the lotus form.

THE PAINTING TRADITIONS

The Jain manuscripts reflect influence of the Mughal and Turkish art in their border decorations and landscapes which turn more elaborate with the depiction of life scenes incorporating Muslim and Hindu figures of the period. The artists successfully got over the limitations imposed by materials used earlier in their folk-like renditions on smaller spaces as illuminated manuscripts on paper replaced the palm leaf ones. Other manuscripts like the *Nimat Nama* (1500–1510) from Malwa and *Laur Chanda* (1500–1525), incorporated the surroundings within the picture frame. There were still others based on literary works featuring Avadhi romances in a more realistic depiction.

Mughal painting received a new impetus under Emperor Akbar's reign (1556–1605). The Hindu and Muslim artists working together in his imperial studio were encouraged to fuse elements of Indian tradition with Persian techniques to broaden the content and appeal of their art. Although religious themes continued to remain the main focus in art, elements of nature were added and depicted more realistically. Akbar who was immensely interested in the traditions of the country, commissioned paintings based on Hindu epics like the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. The groundwork laid by Akbar and built upon by his successors over the next century has been documented in several noteworthy volumes authored by Susan Stronge like *Painting for the Mughal Emperor* and *Made for Mughal Emperors*.

Akbar's successor Jahangir (1605–1627) also had a fascination for art and architecture, and could identify the artist of a given painting by simply looking at it. His connoisseurship extended to include documentation and cataloguing of the work. He had a liberal worldview and encouraged artists to sign their work and paint miniatures based on Christian themes incorporating European elements. Interested in creative experimentation, he commissioned a series of character studies and portraits with faces and bust drawings unlike the tradition of full-length portraits. His collection included an ornate genealogy of his family members and some of his courtiers as portraits in the Italian Renaissance style and illuminated manuscripts, Persian writings, and paintings. Jahangir had his artists accompany him on hunts and paint him in action. They were instructed to depict the flora and fauna naturally and not as decorative motifs. Occasionally, even he took to painting. In his royal atelier, he personally monitored the quality of the artists' work awarding those who excelled. Besides the more accomplished designers and painters who painted the main scene and figures, there were bookbinders, calligraphers, colourists, and jewellers recording the life of the period in their artwork.

Shah Jahan (1628–1658), Jahangir's son, was another connoisseur of art. He is credited for Taj Mahal (one of the Seven Wonders of the World) at Agra, which he got built in memory of his wife Mumtaz Mahal. Courtly splendour and extravagance are hallmarks of his reign. These get reflected in masterly illuminated manuscripts like *Padshahnama*, which uses rich mineral pigments and gold with calligraphy and elaborate borders, bound in a book form wrapped in silk. The book which is currently part of the Royal Collection at the Windsor Castle chronicles his period in delightful visual detail. The art created during his reign also includes exquisite pieces of gold jewellery inlaid with precious stones, finely woven carpets, painted wooden furniture, and costumes.

The art of painting flourished simultaneously in the Rajput-ruled states of Rajasthan, Malwa, and Bundelkhand, and later in and around Punjab and Kangra hills. Towards the end of the 17th century, as the Mughal power dwindled, the artists trained in the royal studios at Agra and Delhi moved to Rajasthan where they were absorbed by the Rajput kingdoms of Bundi, Kota, Marwar, and Bikaner. The families of artists working from home, painted religious manuscripts and

brought them to the court for the king's approval. As they did not have ready access to fine materials as available in the Mughal ateliers they had to adapt to local sources as reflected in ornate Nathdwara paintings, which are embellished with local stones instead of precious ones. They retained the old elements of Jain manuscript tradition while simultaneously incorporating the newer elements that they had learnt from their Mughal masters. The artistic rendering of nature turned more elaborate albeit not very naturalistic and in tune with vernacular poetry of drama and romance. Texts like *Rasikpriya* by Kesav Das were illustrated with paintings of feminine beauty with the heroine depicted in various moods and situations. *Ragamala* paintings or garland of *ragas* brought music and literature alive. The brilliantly coloured paintings depicted Krishna's antics and frolics with reference to sports, rendezvous, and dances. Architecture, however, received little attention in their paintings.

Pahari (i.e., hill) painting flourished in the region of the Punjab hills under the patronage of the Rajput kings, of the sub-Himalayan region in north India. Among the various forms of Pahari painting, Kangra style in Himachal Pradesh stands out for its gentle representation of life set in dense and lush landscape and featuring colourful romances. The nuances of the genre can be appreciated better if one is also familiar with the poetry in Brajbhasha, a regional dialect of Hindi. The Bengali court poet Jayadeva's seminal work *Gita Govinda*, which is an allegory about union between the soul and the god, dramatized as coming together of Radha and Krishna as one, is a prominent subject of the Kangra School. There is a different play in Pahari paintings on epic tale *Ramayana* that depict Lord Ram as heroic and self-effacing while Lord Krishna is featured as fallible and adorable. Other local gods and goddesses are also integral to Pahari paintings. The prevailing political turmoil that the artists found unpalatable never entered their art frame.

The other main centres for Pahari paintings were Guler, Basohli, Chamba, Bilaspur, parts of Jammu, Kashmir, Mandi, and Kulu. Nainsukh, a Brahmin from Kashmir, who later settled in Guler was the most talented and famous Pahari artist, credited with introducing Mughal naturalism into hill paintings and making them more lyrical. Maharaja Sansar Chandra (1765–1823) was its most important patron.

In the Deccan, the painting style of Bijapur and Golconda presented a unique lyrical and sensuous oeuvre, reflecting a blend of the Islamic with the native. The illustrations of the manuscript *Tarif-i-Hussain Shahi* (1565), now in the collection of the Bharata Itihasa Samshodhaka Mandala, Pune, are one of the earliest surviving series of the era. Another illustrated manuscript of this style the *Nujum-ul-Ulum* (Stars of Science) dated 1570, is in the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin. Later in the 18th century, artists started using soft watercolours introduced by the British artists in India to accommodate the changing tastes.

In contrast, the Mysore painting tradition is known for its elegance in muted colours featuring Hindu gods, goddesses, other divinities, and mythological episodes in detail. Devotional in essence and indigenous in style, the Tanjore style goes back to the 16th century reign of Nayakas of Thanjavur (also known as Tanjore). The compact imagery is created through a laborious process of panel painting on solid wood planks, drawn and then painted in rich colours and many layers.

Thus, while the Mughal paintings were mainly about court and royal life, hunts, battles, poetic works, and astronomical texts, the Hindu paintings focused on religion, chivalry, romance, and devotional themes. The illustrated manuscripts, a fine combination of painted visuals and supporting text, evolved from small-sized palm leafs to beautifully bound paper works, popular with kings and private collectors as a mark of their religious affiliation on the one hand and their wealth and prestige on the other. Although writing had existed in India since the times of Emperor Ashoka, it was restricted to stone and metal inscriptions on secular themes or for royal pronouncements. The libraries set up by Jain merchants with commissions for artists added to the vast repository of illustrated manuscripts for posterity. Paper brought in the 15th century by the Sultanate, changed the scenario, as did the introduction of living forms that liberated Mughal art from its self-imposed confines. Calligraphy regarded as supreme art in Islamic world remained integral to the illuminated painting tradition. These and other influences coalesced to evolve a distinct Indian style with Muslim calligraphers

and indigenous painters copying Persian samples and creating Mughal miniature art reflective of pan-Indian aesthetics.

THE ARCHITECTURAL MARVELS

The Mughals with their refined urbanity and elegant lifestyle did not confine their interest to miniature painting. They also built monumental structures that stand amongst the finest examples of Indian architecture for symmetrical design and decorative style. The palaces, forts, mausoleums, mosques, and gardens that they commissioned between the 16th and 17th centuries include the forts at Agra and Fatehpur Sikri, Taj Mahal, Jama Masjid and Red Fort in Delhi, and Shalimar Gardens in Kashmir, etc. The period also witnessed Rajput kings build their expansive palaces and forts in cities like Jaipur in an evolved architectural style incorporating Arab, Persian, and indigenous features.

The Mughals introduced the use of concrete and mortar in buildings instead of only stones as was the practice. Mughal features such as arches, domes, portals, vaults, honeycombed walls, and Islamic calligraphy blended well with Indian trabeate system and floral designs. The royal city of Fatehpur Sikri built by Akbar in the late 16th century with its impressive large gateway Buland Darwaza is an elegant architectural complex. The Humayun's tomb in Delhi and the mausoleum of Itmad-ud-Daulah in Agra are monuments of great art historical significance. Jahangir built the Lahore mosque in Persian style with enamelled tiles. His love for gardens and water is reflected in the Shalimar Gardens in Srinagar. The Taj Mahal built in white marble with ornamentation in mosaic, *jali*, and in-lay work and executed with balanced proportions and symmetry is the pinnacle of aesthetic refinement. During Aurangzeb's reign (1658–1707) squared stone and marble were replaced by brick or rubble with stucco ornamentation for construction of buildings. Srirangapatna and Lucknow have examples of later Indo-Muslim architecture while Badshahi Mosque adjacent to the Lahore Fort is the most impressive building of Aurangzeb's reign. The landscape and gardens built in the Islamic style using rectilinear layouts with pools, fountains, canals, and tents inside the walled enclosure were an integral feature of Mughal monuments. *Char bagh* or rectangular gardens at Taj Mahal, Agra, and Pinjore Garden in Haryana are some such gardens built in this style.

The Rajput warriors who ruled over the princely states of Rajasthan and Saurashtra from the 6th to 20th century were equally fond of grandeur and some outstanding palaces, forts, and temples that they built dot the regional landscape. One of the most celebrated among these is the Hava Mahal or Palace of Winds (1799) with small casements in a curve, projecting *jharokhas* (latticed galleries), and crowning arches. There are also the Jantar Mantars or observatories in Jaipur and Delhi that speak of the architects' knowledge and understanding of astronomy. The 15th century fort at Chittor, built on a hill top, the ornate City Palace at Udaipur, and the impressive Jain temple complex at Ranakpur are exquisite and complex structures built for a specific purpose and class of users. The inner citadels of Rajasthani palaces stand surrounded by the city and are enclosed by a fortified wall or wide moats at Jaisalmer and Deeg respectively. The mid 15th century Man Mandir palace at Gwalior, which is two storeys above and two below the ground level and overhangs a gigantic sandstone cliff, punctuated by massive round towers with domed cupolas and carved parapets with the facade inlaid with blue tiles is an impressive structure. The palaces at Bikaner and Jodhpur made of white marble and yellow pink sandstone are also noteworthy. The Jaipur city palace is a fine synthesis of Rajput and Mughal styles. It stands majestically in the centre of the city, has fountains in the grand courtyards, carved silver and ivory

Overhanging balcony at City Palace, Udaipur, with inlaid artwork, 16th century
A royal hunt, an illustration from the *Akbarnama*, Mughal School, 1590-95 (facing page)

doors, frescos and *jharokhas*, elephant brackets, glass mosaics, and wall paintings. Another impressive building is the holiest shrine of the Sikh religion: Harmandir Sahib Gurudwara (Golden Temple, Amritsar) built in 1604.

In upper Deccan and south India, the Dravidian style remained predominant with no significant traces of Mughal influence till the 14th century, as religion remained central to its architecture, sculpture, and painting. The famous Chennakesava Temple at Belur, the Hoysaleswara Temple at Halebid, and the Kesava Temple at Somanathapur, built between the 11th and 14th centuries are marked for their attention to detail and skilled craftsmanship. The rulers of Vijayanagara (1336–1565) built the Chola temples by laying cut stones one on top of another. They also built several new palaces and temples in and around the capital city Hampi. The two-storeyed Lotus Mahal planned symmetrically in series of squares, speaks highly of the expertise of the *sthapatis* (traditional architects), builders, and sculptors of Hindu temples who followed *Vastu Shastra* norms.

The Nayak Dynasty of Madurai who ruled until early 14th century over today's Tamil Nadu, brought about a change in the lavish Dravidian style as reflected in the revitalized temple architecture in a fusion of Hindu-Islamic style. The art of this period also includes interesting traces of the Portuguese colonial holdings in and around Kochi and Goa. The discovery of a sea route to India by Vasco da Gama in the 16th century led to some exchange that has influenced the religious art and architecture particularly in the churches of the region. However, further research is required for a better understanding of the nature of the impact.

The remarkably varied developments in the arts of the period encompassed the Mughal, Rajput, and Pahari schools from the north and the Tanjore, Chola, Chalukya, Hoysala, and Vijayanagara styles from the south. The impressive repository of art and artefacts features kings and queens, courts and courtiers, palaces and forts, battles and hunts, the *zenana* (enclosed quarters for females) and heroines, music, drama, dance and festivities, devotion and mythology, temples and mosques, life on the street, showcasing the social and cultural history of the era.

SIDDHAPRATIMA YANTRA

This rare Jain altarpiece features the 'presence' of a *jina* or savior-teacher by his absence. It is carved out of a copper sheet and the form is set against the backdrop of an empty silhouette, which is meant to serve as a shrine. The featured image known as *Siddhapratima yantra* or a magical diagram is the typical deity of the Digambara Jains or unclothed monks. The formless *jina* symbolize his transcendence from a corporeal form and associated *karma* to an abstraction signifying a spiritual detachment from the world. The shrine, which is a replica of a pillared niche, is ornately carved with substantial traces of gilding and a silver inlaid inscription which records that the shrine was commissioned in 1333 by a Jain merchant named Muladeva.

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ca. 1333
Artist: Unknown
Sculpture in bronze and copper alloy with traces of gilding and silver
Dimensions: 21.9 x 13.1 x 8.9 cm
Possibly from Rajasthan or Gujarat, India
In the collection of the
Freer Gallery of Art/Arthur M Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, USA

SEATED GANESHA

The elephant-headed god Ganesha or Ganapati is the lord of the *ganas* or dwarf attendants of Lord Shiva. Ganesha is one of the most popular gods of India. This tiny statue with his veins in view adorns finely carved ornaments. Ganesha with his long tusk, leaf-shaped ears, curly strands of hair with an enormous headgear and corpulent human body is sitting on a lotus pedestal. Each of his four hands holds one of his attributes which includes a pot of sweets that he tastes with his trunk. How Ganesha came to assume this semi-human form is the subject of several different stories but what is universally accepted is his generosity as the bestower of earthly prosperity and destroyer of obstacles. He is invoked to seek auspicious beginning and success in different endeavours. The lovable god in ivory, which is a valuable material, was created by a master sculptor, and was possibly owned by a princely household for worship.

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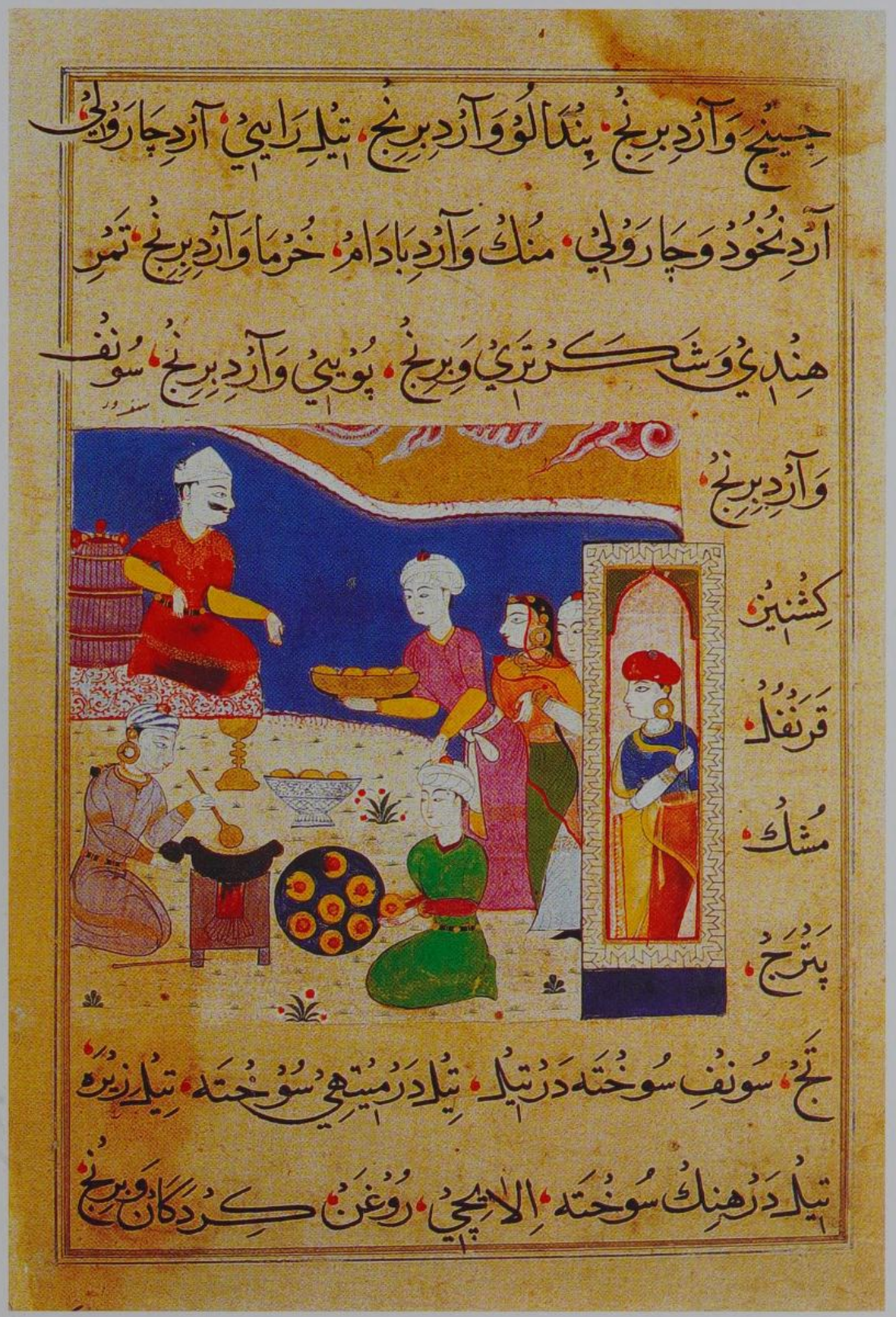
ca. 14th–15th century
Artist: Unknown
Sculpture in ivory
Height: 18.4 cm
From Orissa, India
In the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, USA

A MONK RESISTING THE ATTRACTIONS OF WOMEN: A FOLIO FROM THE *UTTARADHYAYANA SUTRA*

This is one of the earliest known illustrated paper manuscript of the *Uttaradhyayana Sutra* text. It is renowned for its fine lines, harmoniously balanced palette, and a lively composition. The image is that of a front-facing Shvetambara monk clad in white. He appears detached while beautiful young women, sensuous female musicians, and a dancer, dressed in rich diaphanous garments and jewels try to distract and engage his attention. Interestingly there is a lozenge-shaped blank space that interrupts the text, possibly for perforation to bind a cord though no such hole is actually made. The colophon states Stambhatirtha in Cambay, Gujarat, as its place of origin. The *Uttaradhyayana Sutra* is a canonical text classified as a *mula* or 'fundamental' work of Jain scripture on the rules of behavior that govern monastic life for perfect chastity.

ca. mid 15th century
Artist: Unknown
Illustrated manuscript in opaque watercolour and ink on paper
Dimensions: 11.2 x 30 cm
From Cambay, Gujarat, India
In the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK



SULTAN OF MANDU SUPERVISING THE PREPARATION OF SWEETS

The late 15th century *Nimat Namah* manuscript (or Cookery Book) in Persian is housed at the Oriental and India Office Collections of the British Library in London. It was compiled by the Sultan of Mandu, Ghiath al-Din Shah, and completed under the reign of his son. It has intricate paintings in jewel-like tones that illustrate fifty rare recipes inscribed in the book. The composition in an Indo–Islamic genre follows closely, but ineptly, the contemporary idiom of the distinctive Shirazi style and seems to have been executed by an itinerant Persian painter with assistance from local apprentices. The Sultan is profiled with his bushy moustache and red-belted costume sitting on a low throne couch overseeing the preparation and presentation of the food. The landscape portrays an outdoor setting, possibly a garden, as two servants prepare a dish and another attendant brings the Sultan a bowl of food for his approval.

ca. 1490
Artist: Unknown
Painting in watercolour on paper
Dimensions: 31x 21.5 cm
From Mandu, central India
In the collection of the
British Library, London, UK

THE TEN INCARNATIONS OF VISHNU

The painted wooden book cover depicts *Dashavatara* or the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu. It relates to the manuscript of the *Vishnupurana* dated mid 15th century. It shows the development of a painting style following the Pala Buddhist tradition. The early Hindu text, *Vishnupurana*, recounts the various descents or *avatars* made by Vishnu through the ages to perform some heroic acts to help the mankind and preserve the universe. The ten different avatars shown here are (from left to right): *matsya* or fish, *kurma* or tortoise, *varaha* or boar, *Narasimha* or man-lion, Parashurama, Ramachandra, Balarama, Krishna, Buddha, and Kalki. The omission of Vamana (the dwarf incarnation) and inclusion of Balarama instead in this somewhat straight-lined figuration with a liberal use of shades of the red, suggests a local variation reflecting sectarian preferences and in this case also an affinity with the painting tradition of Orissa.

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ca. 1499
Artist: Unknown
Painting in opaque watercolour on wood
Dimensions: 9 x 56.5 cm
From Bankura, West Bengal, India
In the collection of the
Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK

AN INFANT KRISHNA TIED TO A MORTAR: FROM A *BALAGOPALASTUTI* MANUSCRIPT

The painting from *Balagopalastuti*, a Hindu text in verse, is in praise of the charmingly mischievous Krishna in his delightful acts in infancy. The image on the left and described in Sanskrit on the right is that of infant Krishna tied around his waist to a mortar. Standing on his left is his doting foster mother, Yashoda, who is shown admonishing him for stealing butter from the maidens in the neighbourhood. Krishna as a diminutive child, identifiable by his blue skin, raises both his hands above his head to express his remonstration. The three stylized trees in the background and the blue and white streak with wave-like forms running from top down along the right edge are probably meant to depict Vrindavan, Krishna's childhood homeground and the River Yamuna respectively, the settings for many of his pranks as well as miracles. The colourful folio expands the repertoire of illustrated paintings from west India, during the period, beyond the Jain texts.

ca. late 15th century
Artist: Unknown
Illustrated manuscript in opaque watercolour and ink on paper
Dimensions: 10.5 x 23 cm
From Gujarat, India
In the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK

KRISHNA BATTLES THE ARMIES OF THE DEMON NARAKA

This illustrated manuscript features a page excerpt from the dispersed Hindu epic, *Bhagavata Purana* or 'Ancient Story of God'. The manuscript incorporates theological principles with elaborate commentary entwined with complex legends. The books ten and eleven of the scripture are significant sources for Krishna narratives. Within its limited palette and simple composition, the elaborate figural arrangement is built in to produce images of great directness and charm. Lord Krishna and his foot soldiers are shown battling the demon Naraka and his army of men astride elephants and horses. The patterning in the imagery is bold while the palette consists of contrasting colours including red, with blue green, yellow, and white. The enormous freshness and vivacity of the illustration makes it particularly appealing. The work appears indigenous and pre-Mughal on the basis of its stylistic extrapolation and treatment of the subject matter.

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ca. 1520–1530
Artist: Unknown
Illustrated manuscript in ink and opaque watercolour on paper
Dimensions: 20.3 x 23 cm
From Delhi or Agra, India
In the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, USA

KRISHNA AND THE *GOPIS*

Lord Krishna who is regarded as Lord Vishnu's eighth incarnation appears here as the lover boy seated under a tree in a moonlit night. Krishna is featured in his typical blue-skinned cowherd persona surrounded by beautiful milkmaids or *gopis*, vying for his attention. The composition appears indigenous in style. The beautifully ornamented young *gopis* in their patterned robes and fish-shaped eyes appear to be afloat accompanied by Krishna in this romantic imagery possibly located in Vrindavan. This pre-Mughal style illustration is a part of the now dispersed Hindu manuscript *Bhagavata Purana*.

ca. 1532
Artist: Unknown
Opaque watercolour on paper
Dimensions: 13.7x 22.5 cm
From north or west India
In the collection of the
Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York, USA

BOAR HUNT FROM *KIRATARJUNIYA*

This mural belonging to the Virabhadra temple at Lepakshi, which was built during the period of Vijaynagar Empire, represents a rarely illustrated genre of Indian temple painting. It features the boar hunt scene from *Kiratarjuniya*, a 6th century epic by Bharavi. This lively mural painting depicts Arjuna in a fight with a hunter who is Lord Shiva in disguise. The imagery includes forms associated with nature, animals, and birds, besides portraits. The mural is sketched in quick strokes for animated depictions. The painting is one of an extensive series located in the main hall, ceiling, and atrium of the shrine. It is dispersed in a broad frieze somewhat like the earliest work at Ajanta. The colours and lines used in the figuration, their draperies, ornaments, and other forms delineate the contours particularly of the female figures. There are significant geometric and *yantra* forms (magical diagrams) at the top and bottom of the composition along the borders.

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ca. 1550–1600
Artist: Unknown
Fresco
Height: 100 cm
In situ at Virabhadra Temple, Lepakshi, Andhra Pradesh, India

INDO-PERSIAN ASTROLABE

This multi-functional astrolabe, dated around mid 16th century is one of the earliest known Indo-Persian examples of an astronomical instrument. It is attributed to Allah-Dad who was first in the family of astrolabists at Lahore. The family had a connection with the Mughal court possibly during Humanyan's reign. The astrolabe is made of brass plates damascened with silver. It has a nicely inlaid design cut for 36 stars. Two stars appear within the ecliptic circle represented in the tracery by cut-out and engraved figures of birds and other forms. The brass plates are meant for study of latitudes with separate tablets for horizons and ecliptic co-ordinates, while each of the twelve astrological houses is marked on the plates. An astrolabe was used not only for locating and predicting the planetary positions of the sun, moon, planets, and stars, timekeeping, and casting horoscopes in the Islamic world but also for calculating the *qibla* (direction to Mecca) and times for *salah* or prayers.

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ca. 1570
Artist: Attributed to Allah-Dad
Functional object in brass plates
damascened with silver
Dimensions: 255 cm in diameter
From Lahore, Indian subcontinent
In the collection of the
Museum of the History of Science,
Oxford, UK

ARGHAN DEV BRINGS THE CHEST OF ARMOUR FOR HAMZA

The *Hamzanama* is the action-filled epic story that chronicles the colourful adventures of Hamza, a character based on Prophet Muhammad' uncle, who along with his band of heroes fights the enemies of Islam as they travel the world. The fantastic tales from *Hamzanama* so captured the imagination of the young Mughal Emperor Akbar (1556–1605), that his first commission was for a series of manuscript illustrations on the subject. The illustrated *Hamzanama* commissioned by Akbar originally included 1400 folios arranged in 14 volumes, each kept carefully in a large box. The paintings were done on cotton fabric to support the heavy, multi-layered folios that complemented oral storytelling. Just about 170 folios of Akbar's *Hamzanama* exist today and they are held in collections spread around the world. This illumination depicts a scene where Hamza sits on along rocky coast, on a low throne and sheltered under a richly patterned tent. In the foreground the demon, Arghan Dev appears half-submerged in the turbulent waters, carrying a chest full of armour on his head, as others in the frame look at this in amazement. Painted in a colourful palette, the work exemplifies the energy and sense of drama that inform the illustrations of this series, said to have been executed under the direction of two Iranian masters.

ca 1562–1577
Artist: Unknown
Gouache and gold on cotton
Dimensions: 67.5 x 52.5 cm
Possibly from Agra, north India
In the collection of the
Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York, USA

HINDOLA *RAGA*

This painting is part of the series illustrating the *Ragamala* or garland of musical modes series. Painted by a Deccani artist it features a *hindola* or swing at the centre on which is seated the young prince with a beautiful shy heroine in his lap while three pretty maidens stand around him. The maiden on the left is seen holding a stringed instrument and is probably singing for the couple. The two other maidens to the right playfully squirt coloured water from syringes. The elongated figures with sharp features under transparent veils are elegantly dressed. The flowering and fruiting trees and other forms in the composition are painted in a rich palette of red, orange, blue, green, and yellow interspersed with muted colours. These are the stylistic trademarks of the genre. Sultan Ibrahim Adil Ali Shah (1556–1627) who was a great lover of music is said to have commissioned this work though the inscription in Sanskrit giving details of the musical notes represented in the painting at the top of the manuscript suggests its patron to be a Hindu ruler or chieftain.

ca. 1585
Artist: Unknown
Opaque watercolour and gold on paper
Dimensions: 23.8 x 18.3 cm
From north Deccan India
In the collection of the
National Museum, New Delhi, India

THE CONSTRUCTION OF FATEHPUR

The *Akbarnama* is the official chronicle of the Mughal Emperor Akbar's reign (1556–1605) and was written by his court historian and biographer Abu'l Fazl between 1590 and 1596. It was illustrated by a group of forty-nine artists from his royal atelier working over a period of five years between 1590 and 1595. After Akbar's death, it remained in the library of his son, Jahangir, and was later bought and taken to London by the widow of Major-General Clarke who was the Commissioner in Oudh province from 1858 to 1862. The painting depicts workmen building the city of Fatehpur or Fatehpur Sikri, various areas of the construction site, and the action-packed scene. While some workers are busy carrying the mortar others are shown mixing various binding material. There are also supervisors giving instructions to the workers. The chief architect or nobles however sit under the comforts of a canopy enjoying themselves while keeping a track of the construction work as the two elephants at the back add a decorative element by forming an archway with their trunks.

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ca. 1571
Artist: Bhawani
Opaque watercolour and gold on paper
Dimensions: 32.7 x 19.5 cm
From Uttar Pradesh, India
In the collection of the
Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK

BABUR RECEIVING UZBEK ENVOY IN A GARDEN

Babur (1526–1531) the Central Asian king who was a descendant of the great Timur was the founder of the Mughal Empire in India. Here he is seen receiving envoys while being seated in a garden full of flowers and blossoming trees and on a low *takht* or platform beneath a scarlet rectangular canopy. At the top of the composition behind him are the walls of the city in red sandstone with gates half open to allow regulated entry through the wooden gateway. He documented his life in a dialect of Turkish, which was his first language. His son Akbar after taking over the throne ordered the memoirs to be converted to several illustrated copies in Persian. This page is from a copy dated 1590 and it took the artists fifty days to complete it.

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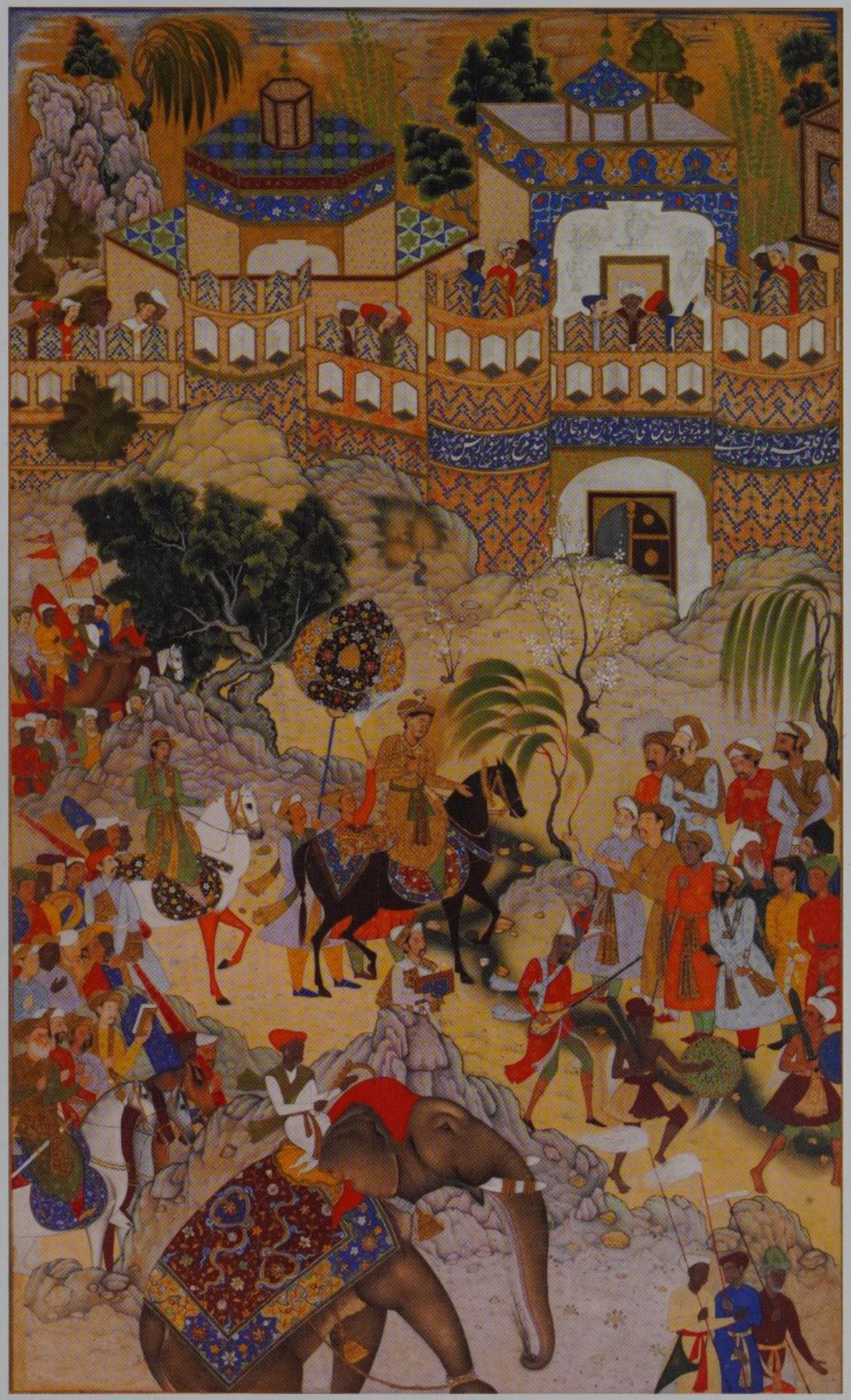
ca. 1590
Artist: Ram Das
Illustrated painting
Dimensions: 24.3 x 13.5 cm
From somewhere in north India
In the collection of the
Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK

AKBAR'S ADVENTURES WITH THE ELEPHANT HAWA'I

This colourful folio is part of the *Akbarnama*, the official biography of Emperor Akbar (1556–1605) and written by Abu'l Fazl in Persian. It was painted by some of the finest Mughal court artists. The scene depicted here shows Akbar taming a wild elephant that went loose running through the capital city, Fatehpur Sikri. His bravery and courage are highlighted as he mounts with ease on Hawa'i, one of the strongest and most difficult elephants to handle, while pursuing the other wild elephant across a collapsing bridge of boats over the River Jamuna. Several of Akbar's soldiers are shown looking at the scene in alarm while some jump into the water following the chase, as the bridge falls under the weight of the elephants. The fort and the landscape in the background add to the lavishness of the work, which is believed to be amongst the earliest illustrated version of the text, written at the end of the 16th century.

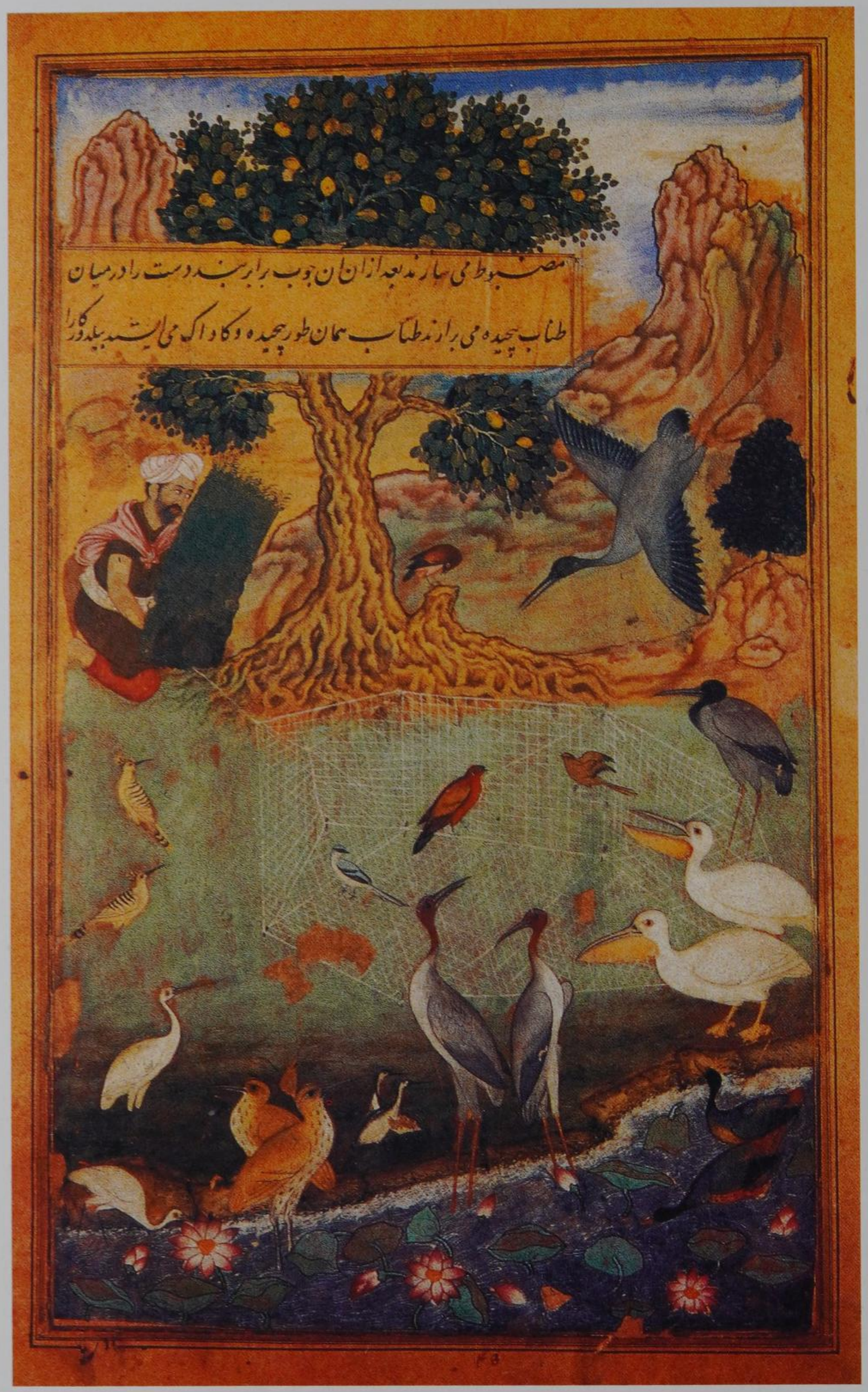
ca. 1592
Artist: Unknown
Opaque watercolour and gold on paper
Dimensions: 33 x 20 cm
From Agra, Uttar Pradesh, India
In the collection of the
Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK



AKBAR'S TRIUMPHAL ENTRY INTO SURAT IN 1572

This illustration from *Akbarnama*, which chronicles the Mughal Emperor's life and times, by Abu'l Fazl depicts Emperor Akbar (1556–1605) riding on a black horse through Surat in western India after conquering the city in 1572. People follow the emperor's cavalcade in a procession as he surveys the fort of Surat. His impressive royal entourage shown in the foreground includes musicians, guards, and nobles on horses and elephants. The patterned fort walls at the back are drawn and painted in meticulous details as are the colourful landscapes and costumes of the people in the image. The royal artists who assisted Farrokh are listed in the *A'in-i Akbari* (the final part of *Akbarnama*).

ca. 1590–1595
Artist: Farrokh Beg
Opaque watercolour and gold on paper
Dimensions: 31.8 x 19.1 cm
From north India
In the collection of the
Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK



BIRD CATCHING NEAR KABUL

The diary of the Indian ruler Babur (1525–1530) contains detailed descriptions of the flora and fauna in the countries he visited or ruled. The miniatures that he commissioned accurately follow the text of the manuscripts with a realistic precision. As a passionate naturalist, he took care to ensure that animals and nature were depicted accurately. The birds featured here can be identified as hoopoes, wood pigeons, rollers, etc. The cranes with their long necks and delicate legs painted in browns, ochre, yellow, and a mix of softer colours appear in fine rendering. The birds and the net cast in the centre with the shooter hiding behind a cover, the lotuses and flowers floating in the pond, the tree with calligraphic inscriptions on a banner, and the distant horizon all add up to make this an exquisite work of nature painting.

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ca. 1598
Artist: Bhag
Opaque watercolour on paper
Dimensions: Approximately 30 x 15.5 cm
From north India
In the collection of the
National Museum, New Delhi, India

THE MADONNA PRAYING BEFORE THE CRUCIFIX

This painting depicts an unusual subject for an Indian miniature of the Mughal era. It is believed to have been copied by a Mughal artist from copies that visiting European Jesuits brought to the royal courts. The painting depicts a crucifix, the lady in prayer, and the Madonna and her child. The little child with the holy book in hand and a halo at his back with Arabic markings on the stone platform add up to make it an engaging and ethereal composition. The masterly skills with which the painting has been executed can be seen in the finely painted borders with birds, circles, and other patterns, flowering plants, and in the folds of robes of the women.

ca. 1600
Artist: Ascribed to the master Manohar
Opaque watercolour and gold on paper
Dimensions: 7.2 x 6 cm
From north India
In the collection of the
St. Petersburg Institute of Oriental Studies,
St. Petersburg, Russia

SQUIRRELS ON A PLANE TREE

This composition by Abu'l Hasan appears to have been a standalone painting rather than part of an illustrated manuscript book. Set against a golden sky, the squirrels are featured going up and down the tree in frantic movements as their tails frolic leaving behind patterned trails. The naturalism expressed in the drawing is impressive. The artist must have observed the squirrels in Jahangir's zoo as the red squirrels featured in the painting are European and not found in India. The iconic plane tree with five-lobed leaves is rendered imaginatively. The squirrels cluster playfully in and around the trunk, birds are perched on the branches, goats leap around while a strange looking hunter attempts to climb the tree, perhaps trying to catch the furry creatures. The exquisite imagery appears to encompass both Iranian and European influences besides Indian.

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ca. 1610
Artist: Abu'l Hasan
Painting on opaque watercolour and ink on paper
Dimensions: 36.2 x 22.5 cm
From north India
In the collection of the British Library, London, UK

AN AGED *MULLA*

The painting, which is a page from an album, is by Farrokh Beg who was an artist from Jahangir's court. It depicts an old man standing with a slight stoop. His long white beard flows down to his chest, signifying his status as a *mulla* or a learned Muslim cleric. His hands are in the front and are covered with the sleeves of his *jama* (upper garment). He is shown amidst a pleasant landscape with two trees in the background: one tall with a thin trunk and birds perched atop and the other short and bushy with leaves in green, red, and yellow. The landscape includes other plants like a young weeping willow. The old and weary attitude of the aged *mulla* is counterbalanced by the *hashiya* or edging, which is painted with magnificently coloured flowers in full bloom and other vibrant flora and fauna around.

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ca. 1615
Artist: Farrokh Beg
Painting in opaque watercolour on paper
Dimensions: 16.8 x 11.2 cm
From north India
In the collection of the
Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK

KUSHA KILLS LAKSHMANA: PAGE FROM A DISPERSED MANUSCRIPT *RAZMNAMA*

The *Razmnama* or 'Book of War', is another special textual–visual combine of shared engagement of the Hindus and the Mughals. It is based on a Persian translation of the Hindu epic *Mahabharata*. The patron for this edition of the book was Abd al-Rahim who was the commander-in-chief of Emperor Akbar's imperial army. He sponsored several such notable illustrated manuscripts. The scene with a subplot from another Hindu epic, *Ramayana*, features Kusha and Lava, the forsaken twin sons of Lord Rama. Although peripheral to the central narrative of *Razmnama*, the delineation of the characters receives full attention from the artists. Kusha whose dark complexion reflects his divine lineage is depicted shooting at Lakshmana, his uncle (Rama's brother), with his magical arrow after decapitating several of his men. The painting features figures with intense facial expressions in an interesting design. It is painted by Fazl, the most original of the twenty-one artists in Abd al-Rahim's atelier.

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ca. 1616–1617 AD
Ascribed to Fazl
Painting in opaque watercolour, ink, and gold on paper
Dimensions: 38.6 x 22.7 cm
Probably from Burhanpur, Madhya Pradesh, India
In the collection of Philadelphia Museum of Art, Pennsylvania, USA

JAHANGIR PREFERRING A SUFI SHAIKH TO KINGS

In this painting, Mughal emperor Jahangir—featured in his final years— is seen offering a holy book to Sheikh Hosein while King James I of England and the Turkish Sultan are both ignored and made to wait. The composition is an attempt to extol the supremacy of the spiritual over the temporal. The king is seated on his throne which is shaped like an imposing hourglass. There is an enormous halo of the sun and the moon on his back. His two *puttis* or child angels are seen wishing him a life of thousand years, which is the artist's attempt to please his aging patron suffering from fears of failing health and a weakened political control. European influence is evident in the image of James I, which is likely to have been copied from one of his portraits; the hourglass; the carpet with imagery of wood nymphs and tulips; and profusely floral *hashiya* or border. This magnificent allegorical portrait of Jahangir is by Bichitr, the famous master artist of the Mughal court of the era. He is featured in the lower left corner of the imagery holding the painting.

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ca. 1615–1618
Artist: Bichitr
Painting in opaque watercolor, gold, and ink on paper
Dimensions: 48.0 x 33.0 cm
From north India
In the collection of the Freer Gallery of Art/ Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, USA

PORTRAIT OF SHAH JAHAN AS A PRINCE

Emperor Shah Jahan in this full, standing portrait is featured facing right and holding a turban ornament in his left hand. His orange *jama* (upper garment), stands out against a deep green background filled with flowering plants. Persian verses appear set in a gold background and interlocking lines scroll down bearing coloured flowers and leaves painted in the narrow borders on either side. The painting is marked for its stately configuration and an unmistakable sense of grandeur and decorum. It reflects the formality of the stately art of the time, bordering on stiffness. Although this handsome portrait is masterly rendered in jewel-like colours the painter seems to have been constrained to record only what was required of him, which is to feature Shah Jahan as an eternal 25 year old in faultless glory.

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ca. 1616–1617
Artist: Abu'l Hasan
Painting in opaque watercolour and gold on paper
Dimensions: 20.6 x 11.5 cm
From north India
In the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK

THE DYING INAYAT KHAN

The image touchingly captures a painful and dramatic revelation of Inayat Khan's (one of the courtiers of Emperor Jahangir) failing health due to his addiction to opium and wine. His falling jaw, sagging mouth, glazed eyes and thinned fingers are depicted with a touch of courtliness as he tries to sit upright with tidied hair, and eyes looking straight ahead, in obedience to Jahangir's command who was so moved to see the painful state of his favourite attendant that he ordered his court painter to make the portrait. The realistic rendering of a specific incident is particularly noteworthy and the depressing theme is expressed with remarkable dignity. The artist's engagement with his subject is evident in the immaculate palette with muted colours juxtaposed against the rich ones, the arabesque carpet, and a range of bottles in the niches, which are effective counterpoints to the pitiable theme. This painting has two different versions. This particular one appears to be the work of Govardhan, an eminent painter of Jahangir's royal workshop at Agra while the other is by the court painter Hashim.

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ca. 1618
Artist: Attributed to Govardhan
Painting in opaque watercolour, gold on paper
Dimensions: 12.5 x 15.3 cm
From Agra, Uttar Pradesh, India
From the Bodleian Library, Oxford University, Oxford, UK

FLOWER STUDIES

This painting by Mansur is on a page from the Gulshan Album. He was graced with the title Nadir al-Asr or 'A Rarity of Age' and was known for his animal and bird studies as well as paintings of flowers. He often accompanied the peripatetic Emperor Jahangir on his various sojourns including one to Kashmir where he painted over 100 studies of ravishing spring time flowers such as roses, violets, tulips, and narcissi in the fields. He also painted flowers planted on the rooftops of houses. This signed floral study is a rare surviving example of the genre. The painting features some identifiable flowers and herbal plants painted from copies of European engravings and botanical illustrations. The panel in the upper left side of the painting is said to be a direct copy that Mansur made from a European herbal study. The lavishly painted page coated in gold features intricate floral and geometric forms. There are differently shaped green leaves, stems, buds and blooms in reds, pinks, and mauves. Although painted more as botanical illustrations rather than in their natural or wild surroundings, the beauty and high workmanship is evident in the artist's handling of the colourful flora and fauna including the distant blue skyline, and the earthy foreground. Also remarkable are the floral and patterned decorations in the framed borders.

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ca. 1615–1620 AD
Artist: Mansur 'Jahangir Shahi'
Opaque watercolour and gold on paper
Dimensions: Approximately 24 x 12 cm
From north India
In the collection of
Golestan Palace Library, Tehran, Iran

PRINCESS NEXT TO A BLOSSOMING TREE

The Mughal miniature painting framed in a beautiful border of gold flowers on blue base features a pretty young princess, said to be Nadira Banu, standing expectantly under a tree laden with pink flowers but sans any leaves. The work is from the Dara Shikoh album, which was given by the prince, Dara Shikoh (1615–59), the eldest son of the Emperor Shah Jahan, to his wife, Nadira Banu. The picture depicts the princess holding a small bunch of flowers in one hand and a branch of a tree in the other. The tender image accentuates her delicate and sensuous beauty, a profile not so commonly displayed outside the *zanana* or women quarters where Mughal women spent most of their time. A lyrical tenderness pervades the refined draughtsmanship soaked in soft colours set against a bold palette. Her slender body, elongated face, lotus-shaped, eyes with arched eyebrows, patterned *choli* (long blouse), and *lehenga* (full length pleated skirt), head covered in a transparent *odhni* (veil), is presented with remarkable restraint. The detailing of the jewellery and embroidered *jutti* (footwear) is carried out with dexterity, making it an elegant poetic rendering of beauty, which was a prominent feature of the era's feminine portraiture genre.

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ca. 1635
Artist: Unknown
Opaque watercolour and gold on paper
Dimensions: 16.6 x 9.9 cm
From Agra or Delhi, India
In the collection of the
British Library, London, UK

JAHANGIR PRESENTS KHURRAM WITH A TURBAN ORNAMENT

The grandeur of the royal Mughals is featured in this ornate painting, which is part of *Padshahnama* (The King of the World). It shows Emperor Jahangir presenting an exquisite family jewel, a turban ornament to his son Prince Khurram (Shah Jahan) on his victorious return from the Deccan in 1617. The painting exudes opulence, majesty, and gaiety. The composition is one among the forty-six miniature paintings commissioned by Emperor Shah Jahan to chronicle the official history of his reign. The illustrated paintings in the manuscript exemplify the Emperor's taste and fondness for grandeur. The costumes and location of the people featured in this painting depict their social and political standing. The Prime Minister, I'timaduddawla, and his son Asaf Khan, Shah Jahan's father-in-law were two very influential members and are seen here standing below the *jharokha* (higher pavilion). The imagery also portrays beautifully designed carpets, grisaille wall painting, symbolic of the just rule of the Mughal empire, a lion and ox lying side by side beneath the globe, female members of the family peeping through their veils from their *zanana* (women's quarters) along with the artist Payag who is seen carrying a book at the bottom left-hand corner.

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ca. 1630–1640
Artist: Payag
Opaque watercolour and gold on paper
Dimensions: 30.6 x 20.3 cm
From north India
In the Royal Collection, Windsor Castle, UK

PORTRAIT OF THE AGED AKBAR

This majestic portrait of Emperor Akbar in old age shows him standing in the centre of a plain and holding a rosary with a golden halo at his back. The dignity on the face of Akbar and the calm surroundings are sensitively executed. The golden halo behind his head symbolizes his royal status and the glory of his empire and peaceful reign. Akbar's costume, his bordered *patka* (turban) and his *katar* (dagger) decorated with gold seem to glow, as clouds and birds of paradise soar above. The lion and heifer sitting at Akbar's feet signify the monarch's long and peaceful reign. Some imprints of the European art are seen in the modelling, perspective, and drawing technique of this composition.

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ca. 1640–1650
Painting in ink and gold on paper
Artist: Attributed to Govardhan
Dimensions: 25.2 x 16.8 cm
Possibly Agra or Delhi, India
In the collection of the
Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio, USA

A SEATED COURTIER

This work appears to have been a study for a larger scene painting. The reason for this conjecture is that the artists in royal atelier of the Mughals made portraits only of emperors, princes, or scenes meant to record significant events of their courtly lives. The man is dressed in a typical Mughal *jama* (upper garment) and turban and is drawn from behind. His attire suggests that he is an ordinary person. He is sitting on the ground with his feet tucked under and his long sword hanging from his belt. The painting reflects a close observation of the form, which reveals an excellence in draughtsmanship of artists in Mughal ateliers — a facet that often remained hidden underneath the patrons' desire for a rich palette and ornamentation in the work. This study provides scholars with an opportunity to explore a more realistic genre of Mughal portraiture as against its more ornate form.

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ca. mid 17th century
Artist: Unknown
Drawing in ink on paper
Dimensions: 15.0 x 8.7 cm
From north India
In the collection of the
Freer Gallery of Art/
Arthur M. Sackler Gallery,
Washington, USA

ILLUMINATED PAGE FROM THE GULSHAN ALBUM

When the Iranian King Nader Shah plundered the city of Delhi in 1739, the album to which this folio belongs, the Muraqqa-e-Gulshan (The Rose Garden Album) or Gulshan Album was one of the treasures that he took back to Iran. This work was painted for Jahangir while he was still Prince Salim. The ornate pages of this volume have led to it being pronounced as 'the greatest of all Mughal books'. Each page includes a central figure or form surrounded by paintings, drawings, and engravings in Iranian, Mughal, and several Indian languages. The outer borders are often filled with figures set in landscapes. This page features broad friezes above and below the central panel. It would have served as the frontispiece of the Gulshan Album. The page was designed by first impressing a geometric grid onto the paper. The intricate floral forms and geometric patterns, which have been delineated by the illuminator with stylized perfection, are liberally coated in gold. This lavishly painted jewel-like gilded page is a paradigm of absolute precision and flawless workmanship derived from the late Timurid illuminations. Drawn and designed like a sun this *shamsa* (literally meaning sun burst) was the frontispiece of the manuscript and was possibly meant to seek divine light and blessings for the royal patron.

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ca. 1st half of 17th century
Artist: Unknown
Opaque watercolour on paper
Dimensions: 40 x 24.5 cm
From north India
In the collection of the
Golestan Palace Library, Tehran, Iran

FRIEZE PANEL

The white marble panel is inlaid with precious coloured stones in a technique known as Pietra Dura, introduced by Italian artists in India in the early 17th century. It was, however, reinterpreted and refined by Indian craftsmen to fit in with the prevalent tastes and requirements and subsequently used extensively in many of the important monuments of the Mughal Empire and the succeeding reigns. This frieze is inlaid with white marble from the Makrana mines in Rajasthan with a range of precious and semi-precious stones brought from various corners of the world including nephrite jade from Kashgar and Khotan, lapis lazuli from Afghanistan, and stones such as carnelian, heliotrope, and agate from various regions of the un-fragmented Indian subcontinent. The use of strapwork (designs imitating interlaced strips) in the ornamentation of this panel indicates the subtle influence that European design must have had on Mughal art of the era.

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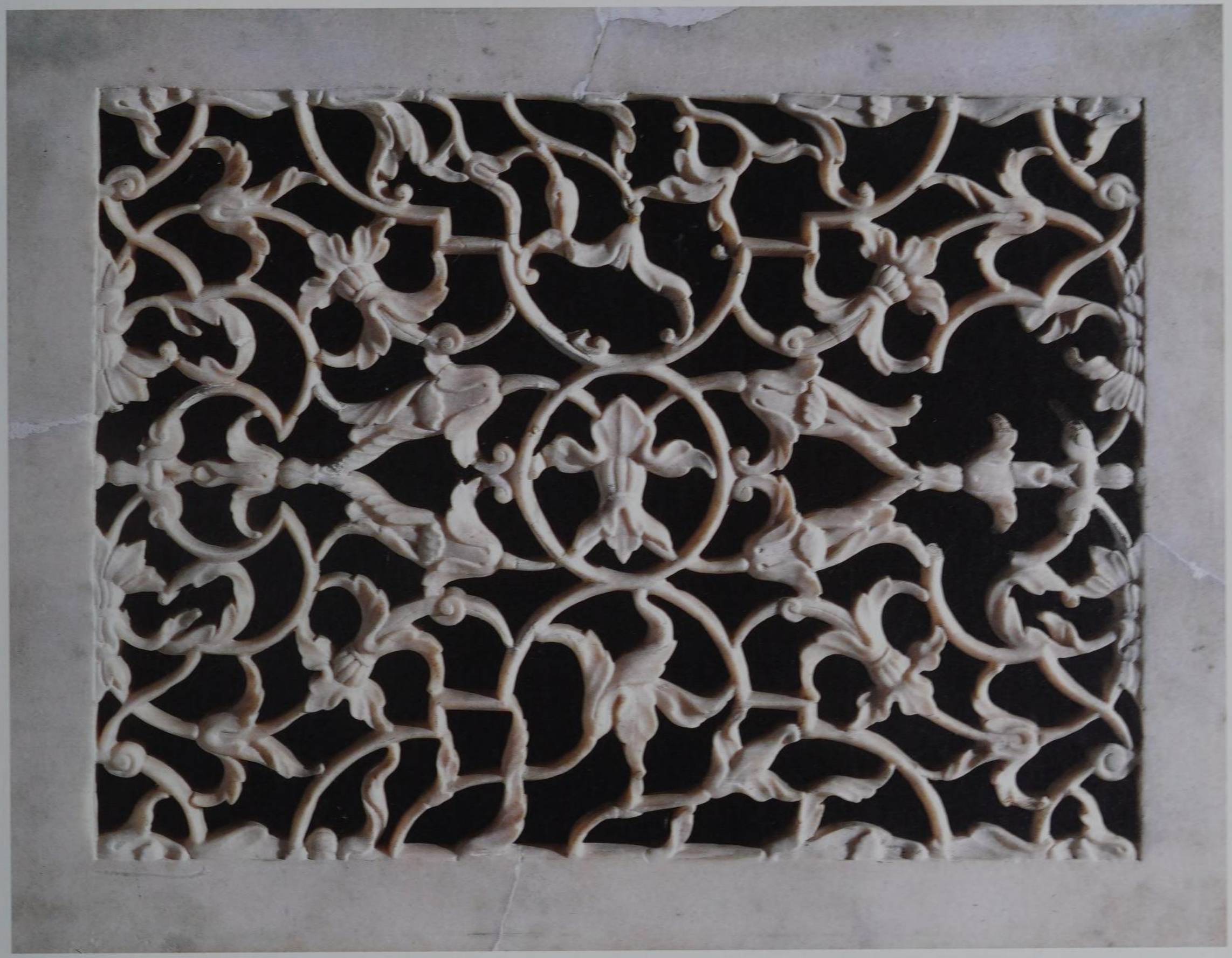
ca. 1640
Artist: Unknown
Architectural fragment in white marble, inlaid with carnelian, yellow, and black marble and serpentine
Dimensions: 24.7 x 83 cm
From Agra, India
In the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK



SCREEN

This pierced marble screen made during the reign of Emperor Shah Jahan seems to have been a part of an architectural building or structure in or around Agra. The intricately carved flowers are laid out in a pattern on a single piece of marble. This is clearly a work of highly skilled engravers and artists who must have known the stone well. The design of the screen is similar to a screen *in situ* at the Taj Mahal's central tomb chamber in Agra, which Shah Jahan had built in memory of his wife, Mumtaz Mahal.

ca. 1640
Artist: Unknown
Architectural fragment in marble
Dimensions: 58.5 x 76.5 cm
From Agra, India
In the collection of the
Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK

SHAH JAHAN'S WINE CUP

This wine cup made of white nephrite jade was for Emperor Shah Jahan (1628–1658), the great Mughal patron of art and architecture. It is inscribed with his Timurid title. The seductive appearance of the jade cup is achieved through subtle modelling and thin-lobed sides that echo the shape of a fresh gourd. The asymmetrical form tapers to form a handle shaped like the head of a wild goat on the right side. The cup sits on a low pedestal of lotus petals with acanthus leaves in low relief. Other naturalistic vegetal elements add to the design that suggests a range of international artistic sources as its inspiration. Jade was the most precious stone in the Islamic lands of the era which was appreciated not only for its beauty, colour, and hardness but also for its medicinal values. It was imported from Khotan in Central Asia for the royalty who preferred to use jade containers as a substitute for pottery and glass for their daily needs.

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ca. 1656–1657
Artist: Unknown
Decorative Object in white Jade
Dimensions: 14 cm
Possibly from Agra, India
In the collection of the
Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK

EMPEROR AURANGZEB

This painting depicts Emperor Aurangzeb as a young man richly dressed and bejewelled. He is seen standing with his face to the left and his right hand is placed on the hilt of a sword which he holds vertically, with its tip on the ground. He is wearing an orange *jama* (upper garment) with a short-sleeved and beautifully patterned coat in ochre. The halo projects an image of power and majesty. The background in pale green with shimmers in the distant skyline adds a distinct aura to the composition. The anonymous artist of this work seems to have relentlessly carried forward the tradition of Mughal portraiture that began in the late 16th century.

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ca. late 17th/early 18th century
Artist: Unknown
Dimensions: 19.8 x 11.3 cm
Painting in opaque watercolour and gold on paper
From north India
In the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK

CABINET

Between 16th and 17th century artisans in the Gujarat and Sind region were known for their finely decorated drop-front cabinets and boxes with inlay work. This cabinet probably from Gujarat in western India has inlay ranging from *sudeli* (micro-mosaic work in wood and metal) to geometric, floral, and figurative marquetry in ivory, either white or stained green, in a variety of wood, brass, or copper. In this composition, the cabinet maker has played with a range of subjects, including animals positioned symmetrically, courtiers and men on horsebacks, and women dancing and playing musical instruments dressed in fine attire. The royal couple seated on a platform at the top end are attended to by their staff.

ca. later 17th century
Artist: Unknown
Wooden cabinet inlaid with ivory
Dimensions: 130 x 64 cm
From Gujarat or Sind
In the collection of the
Victoria and Albert Museum, London, uk

SULTAN 'ALI 'ADIL SHAH II

This portrait of 'Ali' Adil Shah II holding a falcon represents the Deccani preference for decorative compositions with some stylized details. The Bijapuri ruler is drawn in a peculiar manner. He is shown standing on a dark green mound in a strange landscape which has a small hill and mysterious field of gray merging into pinkish and blue rocks with waterfowl and odd birds in the air. His left hand is placed on a large black shield with fingers bent downward and shaped oddly. His eyes are swept back and the eyebrows rise in an arc which dominates his face with a long straight nose. The halo separates 'Ali 'Adil Shah from his surrounding space, which is painted in thin gray brushwork. A cluster of projected and brightly coloured rocks at the end make it into a fantastic and somewhat unrealistic setting.

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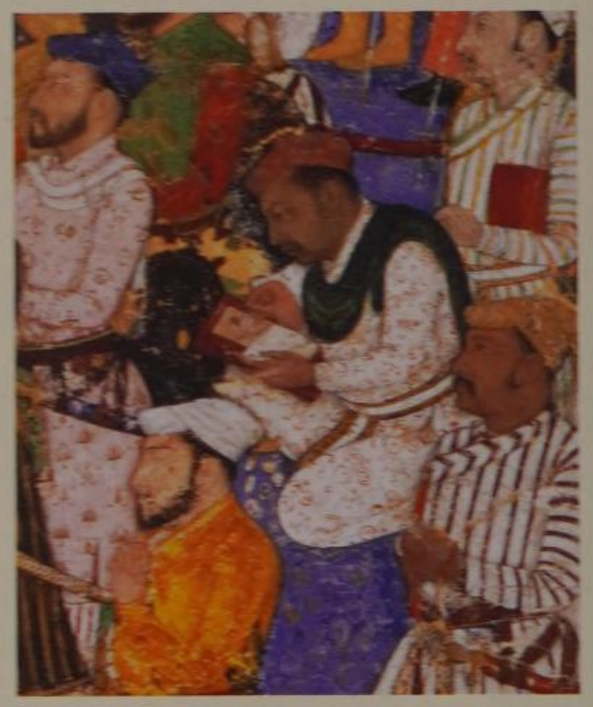
ca. 1670
Artist: Unknown
Painting in opaque watercolour and gold on paper
Dimensions: 26.2 x 15.4 cm
From Bijapur, Karnataka, India
In the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Pennsylvania, USA

Mughal Atelier

It was the Mughal Emperor Humanyun who invited the two Safavid artists Abd as-Samad and Mir Sayyid Ali to join his court, first in Kabul and then in India. Yet it was Humanyun's son and successor Emperor Akbar who truly founded and developed the imperial atelier. He asked these two Persian masters to head a *taswirkhana* (workshop or atelier of painters) as part of his *kitab-khana* (royal library) and train his artists, similar to the practice at Persian imperial courts. These ateliers grew in size, status, and significance during the subsequent century under the successive reigns of Jahangir, Shah Jahan, and Aurangzeb, who commissioned works on their memoirs and family portraits that chronicled their eras into glowing illustrated manuscripts.



A large number of artists worked together in teams at the *taswirkhanas* and each specialized in working on a different aspect of the miniature. They worked under the supervision of a librarian. *Taswirkhana* was part of a larger library that was responsible not only for the production but also for the care of the manuscripts held in the collection. The artists were supplied with the best pigments, brushes, and paper to produce exquisite works and enjoyed the largesse of the king if he was pleased with the result

The main design and layout was determined by the master artist, mostly the calligrapher who followed and copied the royal *farmans* (orders or pronouncements) with a specially prepared *lekhni* (pencil or *qalam* i.e., bamboo pen) that was dipped into a small earthen saucer or shell with *siyahi* (ink) to scribe on the paper. The more experienced artists were responsible for drawing, composition, and portraiture while the less experienced ones did the colouring using spaces provided by the calligrapher to paint the imagery in harmony with the overall story or plan. They also prepared the paper while the *mistar* (handyman or the line-person) impressed lines on pages to help copyists maintain straight lines. The *naqqash* (illuminators) embellished the image with details such as costumes, carpets, and background while

Self-portrait of Mir Sayyid Ali, painted in Lahore, 1555
Artist Nanha at work, detail from a folio of the *Jahangirnama*, 1615-1618

another artist drew the fine lines in gold to frame or separate the text. The borders in miniature paintings were also decorated and embellished with great care. And when all works were ready, the binder prepared an elaborate cover, which was a work of art in itself.

In the Mughal ateliers, special attention was paid to preparing the *vasli* or paper made of vegetable fibre with two or more sheets pasted together to give it a stiffness before getting drawn or painted over. Miniatures were done mostly on handmade paper, which was initially imported from Iran but manufactured in Punjab from 16th century onwards. They were also painted on silk, or inlaid on marble and ivory with glowing minerals, animal and vegetable colours, and gold leaf. Mineral pigments were laboriously ground and mixed with gum arabic. Paints were then applied in layers. The work was repeatedly burnished on the reverse side with an agate to make the surface dense, glossy, and enamel-like. Pigments such as *kajal* (lamp black), *safeda* or *chuna* (lime), *neel* (indigo), *harabhata* paste of green leaves, *geru* (iron oxide), *kesar* (saffron), etc., were preserved in dry form and mixed into a paste in the desired consistency and colour combination and applied on a wet surface. Clay, gum, jaggery, and other organic materials were used for binding and reinforcement, while finger tips and handmade brushes of sticks bound with cotton, thread, or rags at the tip, besides squirrel and goat hair were used for colouring the work.

These ateliers focused on the grandeur of the Moguls and Persians lifestyle of the times, featuring the kings, queens, and their subjects in vibrant colours and in a luxurious world of physical beauty, romance, and sensuality devoid of any religious or social messages. The subjects varied from love scenes, court vistas, portraits, and scenes reflecting the pageantry of the palaces and royal lifestyle, hunting scenes, life of the commoners, festivals, ceremonies, etc.

Indigenous and Hindu artists worked alongside Muslim and Persian artists in the Mughal ateliers in Agra and Delhi. The younger ones learned by working as apprentices under the care and supervision of the masters. They were trained to sit in a certain posture on the floor so that they could draw and paint properly and taught how to hold paper, and use the tools, sharpen the chisels, make squirrel hair brushes, and clean and dress the stones.

Artists worked collectively on a single work, which facilitated the swift and massive production of imperial manuscripts though it also resulted in a somewhat homogeneous and occasionally uniform style. It also led some artists to specialize. Some excelled in painting the court, others in battle scenes, still others in painting the flora and fauna while a few artists focused only on portraits. Although the king encouraged the artists to inscribe names to their work, the talent of the artists rarely shattered the anonymity that, in India, went hand in hand with all creativity.

Turki odes by Hasayn Bayqara, calligraphy with portraits of artist at work by Dawlat, Gulshan Album page, 1610

HANUMAN BEFORE SITA

The 17th century painting is based on a Hindu theme from the epic *Ramyana*. It is believed to have been painted in the Deccan region during the rule of Islamic monarchs. The veneration of monkey-faced human bodied god Hanuman permeates this colourful work which depicts an episode from the epic when Hanuman, an ardent follower of Lord Rama, reaches Lanka and contacts Rama's wife Sita who was abducted and held in captivity by Ravana, the demon king of Lanka. Hanuman is seen here with folded hands in reverence and solemn Sita is gracefully seated in her small shrine-like pavilion with her right hand raised in acknowledgement. The two women seated outside the pavilion are possibly her guards or attendants. Hanuman's alert and agile tail rises up to end in a twirl above his head. The ornaments worn by the women, their wide open eyes, and a straight-faced look add charm to the composition. The bright red and orange associated with Hanuman appears on his chin and nose and also in the flowers, costumes, and painted hands of the ladies, which offer a contrast to the greens in the background. The nuance in the colouration and rendering of the imagery is akin to folk painting of the region.

ca. 17th century
Dimensions: Approximately 19.3x 23.2 cm
Artist: Unknown
Painting in opaque watercolour on paper
From Karnataka, India
In the collection of the
National Museum, New Delhi, India

LEAF FROM A MANUSCRIPT OF JAYADEVA'S *GITAGOVINDA*

This painting is inscribed at the top by a verse from the *Gita Govinda*, which is a lyrical poem in Sanskrit by Jayadeva. It depicts Lord Krishna's courtship of Radha and other cow herdesses. The popular poem is depicted in equally lyrical and tender visualization in many paintings. *Gita Govinda* revolves around many aspects of passion ranging from the lovers first encounter and their initial awakening to passionate love, fierce regrets, and simmering jealousies leading to tender consummation. Krishna is dressed in a flowered *pitambara* or yellow-coloured attire (characteristic of Krishna), and is the centre of attraction for the maidens. The locale is a grove with two trees whose branches spread through the whole width of the manuscript page set against the yellow sky. The trees serve different purposes—they break the continuity and indicate separation of scenes and events in terms of time besides adding to the beauty and balance of the composition.

ca. 1600
Artist: Attributed to Govinda
Illustrated paper manuscript in opaque watercolour
Dimensions: Approximately 9.5 x 23.2 cm
From Gujarat or Rajasthan, India
In the collection of the Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena, California, USA

MALAVAKUSIKA RAGA: PAGE FROM A DISPERSED RAGAMALA SERIES

Ragamala or garland of *ragas* paintings are a series of illustrative paintings from medieval India depicting musical modes in pictorial form. The present image is an illustration of Malavakausika, which is one of the six main male *ragas* more commonly known as Malakaus. The scene is located in the courtyard of a house with the principal character, possibly a prince, sitting on a chair, which is supported by a huge bolster with a cup possibly with wine in his hand. The left half of the image is occupied by a pavilion with a bed laid out in a pillared room. The sky visible behind is rendered with shades of orange and blue. The man's legs are in a *yogapatta* posture, which is a symbol of meditative practices but his attire, jewellery, and the grandeur of the surroundings, including the maid who stands by fanning him with a fly-whisk, suggest that he is an aristocrat.

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ca. early 17th century
Artist: Attributed to Dalchand
Dimensions: Image: 21.9 x 18.7 cm
Painting in opaque watercolour,
ink, and gold on paper
Probably from Amber, Rajasthan, India
In the collection of the
Metropolitan Museum of Art,
New York, USA

SARANG RAGINI

The miniature painting is a part of the celebrated Ragamala series of the Mewar School from Rajasthan. The square frame features two musicians dressed in imposing headgear and brightly-coloured attire sitting in front of a temple and playing musical instruments. Three peacocks on the scene seem mesmerized by their music. The trees, clouds, and hills in the background add to the lyrical beauty of the colourful composition. The work was painted by artist Nasiruddin in Chawand, which was the capital of the Rajput kingdom of Mewar from 1585 to 1609.

ca. 1605
Artist: Nasiruddin
Painting in opaque watercolour on paper
Dimensions: 15.4 x 15.6 cm
From Mewar, Rajasthan, India
In the collection of the
Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK

THE AWAKENING OF KUMBHAKARANA

This painting features an interesting episode from the Hindu epic *Ramayana*. In this composition Ravana's messengers are seen trying to awaken his brother Kumbhakarana from deep sleep as they want him to join them in the impending battle against Lord Rama. Kumbhakarana lies with his mouth and nostrils wide open in the centre of the frame occupying most of the space. He appears to be snoring. The men and women in the scene are dressed in their traditional attire—women with ornaments and men with their elaborate headgear—while animals and strange creatures stand by watching the drama unfold. The men sing songs, beat the drums, and even hit Kumbhakarana with spears, rods, and flaps while elephants tread over him but to no avail. The painting is from folio 64 of a seven-volume manuscript, *Ramayana*, that was commissioned by Maharana Jagat Singh of Mewar (1628–1653).

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ca. 1653
Artist: Sahibdin
Opaque watercolour on paper
Dimensions: 23 x 39 cm
From Mewar, Rajasthan
In the collection of the
British Library, London, UK

THE BOAT OF LOVE

The fortress near the Gundala Lake in Rajasthan is a prominent feature that frequently appears in Kishangarh paintings marked for their elongated stylized figuration and lyrical renderings around the popular Radha–Krishna theme. In this painting, the lake is swarming with ducks, lotuses, and water lilies. It features a white pavilion at the centre that is accessible only by boat. The beautiful couple Radha and Krishna with halo around their heads is dressed in regal costumes and jewellery and accompanied by pretty maids on the boat ride. In another section of the composition, the pair is seen standing under a tree gazing at each other with no one else to distract them. The distant skyline, flora, fauna, and architectural landscape endow this exquisite painting with a poetic touch.

ca. 1750
Artist: Nihalchand
Opaque watercolour on paper
Dimensions: 43 x 33.5 cm
From Kishangarh, Rajasthan
In the collection of the
National Museum, New Delhi, India

LADY YEARNING FOR HER LOVER

The painting on the theme of love is set in white with the main characters appearing in a restrained palette, which is a typical feature of the Bundi School of painting. A marbled terrace is lit brilliantly by the moonlight. The *nayika* or heroine in bare torso is seen lying on a red couch and desperately yearning for her absent lover. Her head is flung far back and she is holding a *hookah* (pipe) in one hand and resting the other on her breasts, a posture conveying her despair vividly. Her fixed gaze through her attendant who is trying to console her with folded hands conveys the heroine's absent-mindedness. The long open hair and the prostrate figure permeate the image with passion. The painting can also be interpreted as the artists attempt to bolster his royal patron's ego by suggesting that this is the effect his absence has on his lovers.

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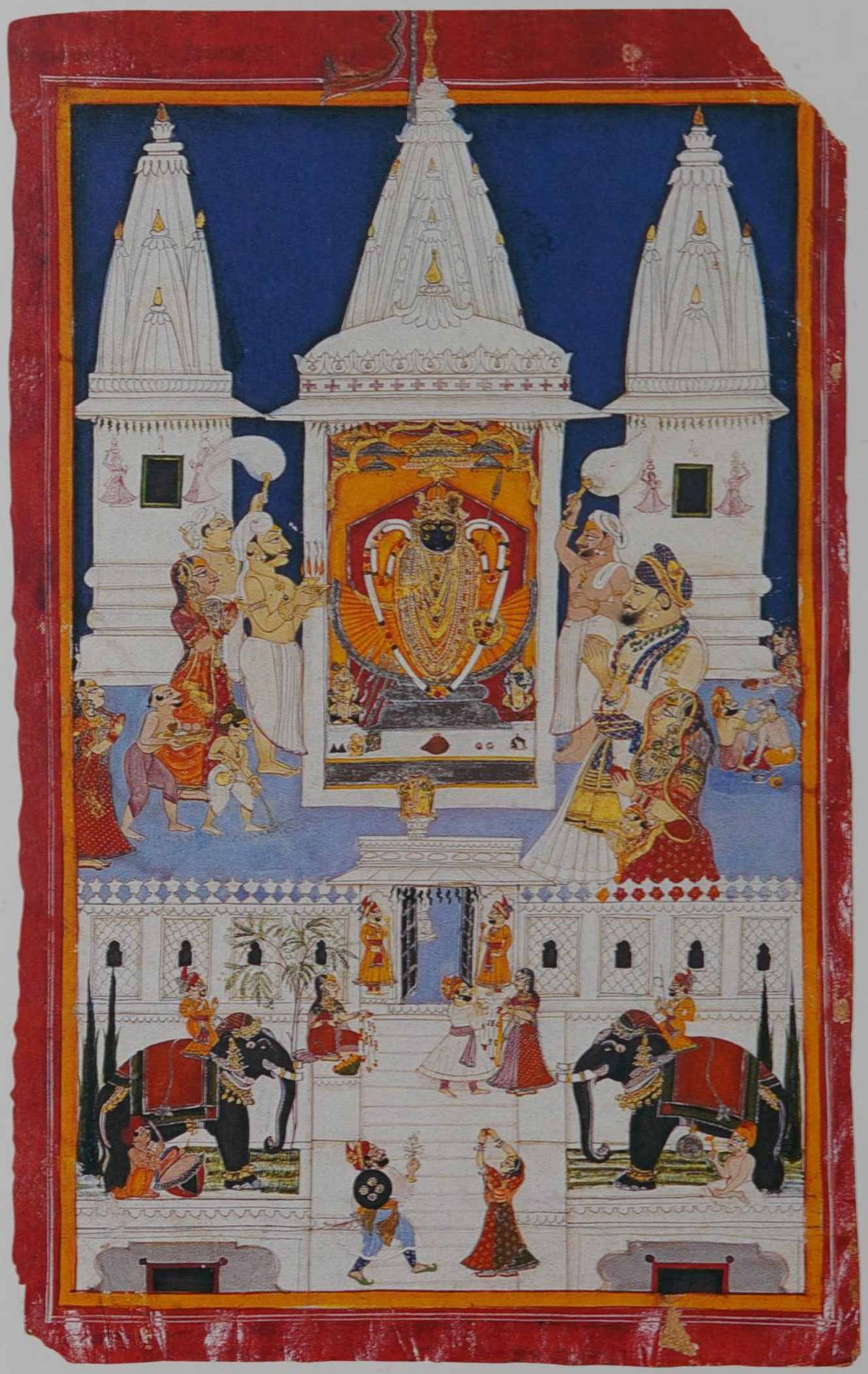
ca. late 18th century
Artist: Unknown
Painting in opaque watercolour on paper
Dimensions: 24.3 x 15.8 cm
From Bundi, Rajasthan, India
In the collection of the
Harvard Art Museums/
Arthur M. Sackler Museum,
Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA



A KOTA NOBLE VISITING THE SHRINE OF DAKORJI

Shri Nathji is a unique representation of Lord Krishna as the main cult image for the followers of Vallabhacharya. This dark bluish Krishna image as Shri Nathji is different from his usual depictions as a young cowherd. It is enshrined in the temple interiors at Nathadwara in Rajasthan. The deity is covered in elaborate and colourful Rajasthani costume with a liberal use of yellow and blue and embellished with ornaments ranging from crown to necklaces, arm bands, and anklets. Shri Nathji is seated on his throne and being worshipped by the noble and his family. While one priest is shown performing the religious rites the others are featured carrying fly whisks. The elephants and the noble's attendants stand outside with garlands and flowers waiting for their turn to pay obeisance to the God. This style of painting with colourful inlaid work is typical of Nathdwara, which in the 18th century emerged as an important temple city for pilgrims and artists from Mewar, Kota, Ajmer, and Delhi who congregated here to produce paintings for the elaborate ritual calendar of the deity.

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ca. 18th century
Artist: Unknown
Opaque watercolour on paper
Dimensions: 34 x21.2 cm
From Kota, Rajasthan, India
In the collection of the
Bharat Kala Bhavan, Varanasi,
Uttar Pradesh, India

GODS PAY HOMAGE TO BHADRAKALI

The fearsome Goddess Bhadrakali also known as Kali, the 'dark black one', is dressed splendidly adorning jewels with a halo of fiery brilliance. The image which is a combination of destruction and beneficence shows Bhadrakali brandishing a variety of weapons in all of her eight hands except the one in which she holds a lotus, a symbol of purity. Here she stands atop a prostrate naked male. Kali was known for her tantric practices and magical power. She is venerated by the three principal Hindu gods—Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva—who genuflect before her. Her round face and predatory eyes painted in bold colours are typical characteristics of the Basohli style in which raised white paint is applied to accentuate the pearls, ornaments, and beetle wings as suggestions for emeralds. The style interestingly incorporates pieces of shells of beetles along with gold, silver, and other rare pigments. This goddess from northern Hamalayas is worshipped across India in different forms and names.

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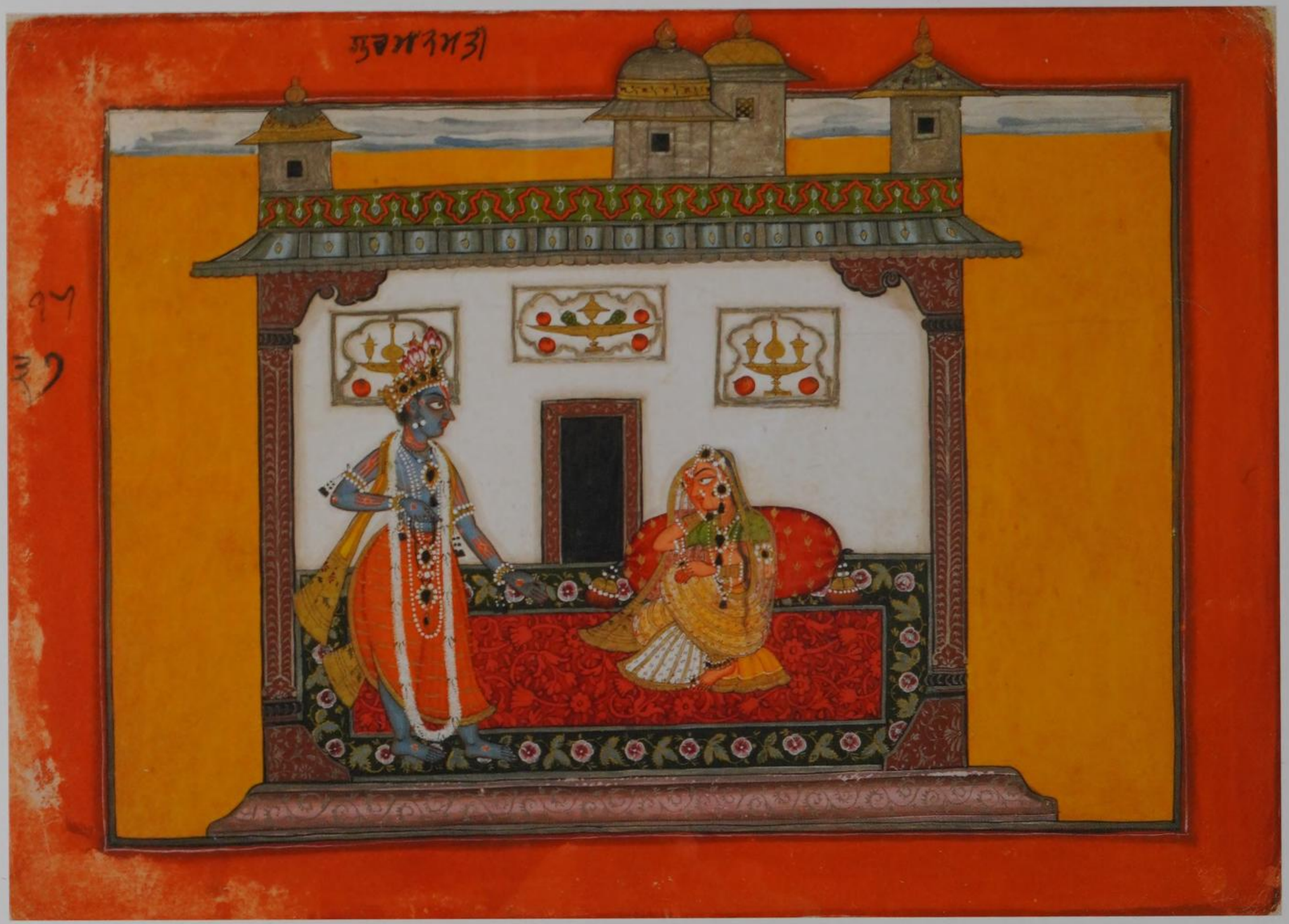
ca. 1665
Artist: Unknown
Painting in opaque watercolor, gold, silver, and beetle wing cases on paper
Dimensions: 21.7 x 21.5 cm
From Basohli, India
In the collection of the
Freer/Sackler Gallery,
Smithsonian Institution, Washington, USA



A *NAYIKA* AND HER LOVER: PAGE FROM A DISPERSED *RASAMANJARI* SERIES

This painting is an illustration to the *Rasamanjari*, which is a 14th century text that dealt with the classification of *nayaks* and *nayikas*, i.e., heroes and heroines respectively in love poetry. In this 17th century Basohli school visualization of the text, the artists from the Punjab hills in north India adopted Lord Krishna as the ideal lover and *nayak* in most of their compositions. In this painting, Krishna is shown arriving at the pavilion as the awaiting maiden gazes at him expectantly. The couple is dressed in brightly coloured decorated garments with glistening jewellery embellished with beetle wings and gold covered from head to toe. They generate a picture perfect image of intense emotions, romance, and beauty. The characters' full cheeks and wide-open eyes, their brightly coloured attire, and the lyrical details of the pavilion and background glowing in deep hues of red and orange, which makes the scene romantic and poetic.

ca. 1660–1670
Artist: Unknown
Painting in opaque watercolor, gold, and beetle-wing cases on paper
Dimensions: 23.4 x 33 cm
From Basohli, India
In the collection of the Harvard Art Museums/ Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Cambrige, Massachusetts, USA

KRISHNA SWALLOWING THE FOREST FIRE: FOLIO FROM A *BHAGAVATA PURANA* SERIES

This Pahari painting belonging to the Chamba School replays an important episode from Lord Krishna's early life. He is seen performing a miracle standing inside a ring of fire and swallowing the flames while cows and his cowherd companions in their simple loincloths huddle together around him for protection. The turbulence created by the wild blaze is conveyed through the expressions and actions of the cowherds who cover their eyes and faces, the birds trapped within the fiery circle, or the frightened animals trying to leap away to safety as the flames soar up. Krishna dressed in a long orange *dhoti* (lower garment) and wearing a golden crown with peacock feathers and lotus buds is shown standing unperturbed with folded hands amidst all this commotion. The artist cleverly shows Krishna swallowing the fire by drawing a trail that goes into his mouth.

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ca. mid 18th century
Artist: Unknown
Painting in opaque watercolour on paper
Dimensions: 9 x 28.3 cm
From Chamba, Himachal Pradesh, India
In the collection of the
Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK

THE FIGHT AGAINST RAVANA: FOLIO FROM A *RAMAYANA* SERIES

The miniature depicts a battle scene from the *Guler Ramayana* series, which is identified by its colours and the borders with flowers. The ten-headed Ravana is shown sitting on his chariot pulled by horses and shooting arrows at his opponents using his multiple arms. His army of fierce demons and soldiers ride aggressively towards the enemy. The picture of his opponents is entirely different as Lord Rama's army of monkeys is shown fighting with boulders and uprooted trees. The stark difference in the attitudes of the two sides is obvious as Ravana looks restless while Rama sits on a boulder with his brother, Lakshman watching the ongoing battle calmly, his arrows lying unused beside him. In the background, at the rampart of Lanka city, bearers, drummers, and musicians can be seen trying to bolster their army's morale. As the legend goes, Rama succeeds in rescuing his wife, Sita, from Ravana's captivity by defeating him.

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ca 18th century
Artist: Unknown
Painting in opaque watercolour and ink on paper
Dimensions: 25.3 x 35.5 cm
From Guler, Himachal Pradesh, India
In the collection of the Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin, Germany

KRISHNA AND RADHA IN THE GROVES

The Kangra painting, which is known for its exalted play of the serene beauty and ethereal charm of the native land appears here as a visual melody of Radha and Krishna's love legend. The *shringara* rasa or the amorous sentiment is featured against a pastoral landscape with luxuriant terrain that makes up the Kangra region. The imagery seems to have been executed for Sansar Chand, known for his patronage of the arts. Especially noteworthy are the slender forms and sharp features of the immaculately attired figures that also seem to emanate light. The lithe and fair Radha is seated possibly on a floating carpet made up of lotus leaves with the blue-skinned and handsome Krishna beside her who entreats her to be cheerful now that they are together. The detailed depiction of the dark green trees, thick foliage, colourful flowers in bloom, and birds perched on trees creates a colourful forest vista, set against the golden sky endowing the composition with a sensuous beauty as do the figures including the two young maidens waiting and hiding behind the bushes.

ca. 18th century
Artist: Unknown
Painting in opaque watercolour and gold on paper
Dimensions: 37x28 cm
From Kangra, Himachal Pradesh, India
In the collection of the
National Museum, New Delhi, India

Colonial and Modern Indian Art

Mid 18th–Mid 20th Century

Colonel Mordaunt watching a cock fight at Lucknow, oil painting by Johan Zoffany, 1790
Chitto Prasad, Jallianwala Bagh massacre, pen and ink on paper, 1940 (facing page)

The narrative of Indian art took a different direction with the arrival of the British in India. Initially they were represented by the East India Company whose original trade interests in India furthered to imperial ambitions. The visitors were quickly able to annex many of the Rajput and south Indian princely states, and overthrow the Mughals at Delhi in 1857. Finally the entire Indian subcontinent became a part of the British Empire in 1877 with Queen Victoria being declared the Empress of India in a spectacular *durbar* (assembly of acceded nobles and princes) held in Delhi. The manner and the grandeur of the *durbar* was the first amalgam of British formalities and tastes with indigenous decorative arts and culture, which laid the foundation of the colonial genre of art in India.

The variety, colours, and style of the Indian imagery encountered in the country, confounded some of the British. The fulsome, elaborately ornamental Indian figuration was categorized by their critics as 'much-maligned monsters', to quote a phrase from Partha Mitter's book *Much Maligned Monsters* on Western reactions to Indian art. But there were also a few others who found Indian art engaging, once they were able to grasp its finer nuances. At the turn of the 19th century, the Company officials and later the British Empire representatives began to commission work from Indian artists. Their motive was primarily to document the cultural, social, and political landscape of the country for their official records and understanding. These paintings were also sought by the British for their personal collections. They wanted to take these back home, to show off the picturesque and exotic land that they had come to rule. The indigenous artists readily took up the assignments, adapting to the demands and tastes of their new masters as there was a decline in the traditional patronage. The Indian artists painted historical monuments; images of native rulers, traders, and professionals; flora and fauna; festivals; ceremonies; dances; music as well as portraits to fulfil the ever growing demand for this new type of imagery that the British could buy for very little money. Some of the local artists were also made to work under the supervision of British artists invited from London, Edinburgh, and elsewhere. They taught the natives about realism, perspective, water colours, and oil painting techniques. The Indian artists who were used to working from stencils very gradually took to the Western practice of free-hand drawing. This hybrid style that developed in the course of time is known as the Company School of Art. This school of art is an amalgamation of naturalistic representation with a lingering nostalgia for the warmth and stylization of illuminated Indian miniature painting style. The Company School painting appears in an in-between state which is neither realistic nor free expression. A degree of Western academic realism, as a close representation of the visual reality, perspective, volume, and shading, resulted from the changes in the medium as the artists began to draw using pencil or sepia wash on European paper and paint with watercolours, abandoning gouache, later taking to painting in oil on canvas. The Company painting style which was less laborious and quicker to produce than miniatures and gouache caught on with the artists and it quickly spread from the Madras Presidency in south India to other parts of India like Calcutta, Murshidabad, Patna, Benares, Lucknow, Agra, Delhi, Punjab, and several centres in west India.

The lure of Indian riches also brought several British artists to Indian shores in search of work. Many of their paintings were bought by Indian princes and rich merchants to decorate their homes; Nawab Shuja-ud-Daulah of Oudh was one such royal. There were many foreign artists who worked for the British establishment in India to make a visual record of the empire. Amongst them were the famous duo, Thomas Daniell and his nephew William Daniell, who reached Calcutta in 1785. They captured the glimpses of the city, its buildings, *ghats* or river banks, and temples in coloured aquatints. The Daniells toured through India and painted some magnificent views of the Indian landscape in oil and aquatints. Their seminal work entitled 'Oriental Scenery' became very popular with the British elite. Their paintings included some unconventional motifs contributing to the image of India as a land of romance and glory— a lingering feature of the Raj nostalgia. Another artist was William Hodges whose aquatints, 'Select Views in India (1785–1788)' presented yet another exotic view of the picturesque Indian scenery. The artists James Fraser and Johann Zoffany also depicted local social customs of the time such as *sati* (a practice of burning widows), while many other British artists, draftsmen, surveyors, engineers, and amateurs worked and travelled through the subcontinent to

Couple, Kalighat painting, natural pigment on paper, 1930s
M.K. Parandekar, Karla Caves (Lonavala), oil on paper, 1920s (facing page)

make drawings, prints, and paintings on paper and canvas to encapsulate the image of the British presence in India. But the British were quick to realize that the native artists were good and could depict Indian subjects far more accurately and at a fraction of the cost, thus the Western artists were quickly replaced by the indigenous ones. Amongst the better known Indian artists of this genre were Sewak Ram from Patna and Ghulam Ali Khan and members of his family from Delhi. Some of their large paintings of Indian festivals were collected by Lord Minto and Lord Amherst, amongst others.

Architectural buildings that came up during the 19th and 20th centuries included bungalow style architecture and some large public buildings including railway stations, churches, and mansions, reflecting a mix of Gothic, Christian, English Renaissance, and Victorian styles. Churches and buildings with a clean English look and inspired by London models were built by architects brought from England. The colonial architecture of tall Bombay buildings in a regal and neo-classical style turned it into a Westernized city. The French and the Dutch left their colonial imprints in cities like Goa and Puducherry. But it is the grand British imperial capital of New Delhi with the town hall, secretariate, the King`s Way, hotels, Connaught Place, rows of bungalows, and finally the majestic regal lodge, which represents the perfect synthesis of Indian and European architectural features. The regal lodge in pink stone formerly called the Viceroy's House now serves as the official resident of the President of independent India.

There were undercurrents of tension between colonialism and nationalism behind the serene-picturesque display of the new style of work. The colonial educational and cultural institutions—galleries, art societies, and art schools modelled on Western academic canons, concepts, and tastes were set up in Calcutta. The art training Institute established there in 1839 was christened as Government College of Art & Craft in 1851. It was soon followed by the Madras Art School in 1850 and Sir J. J. School of Arts in Bombay in 1856 (with support from Jamshethji Jijibai, a Parsi industrialist who was on the selection committee for the 1951 exhibition of Indian arts in London) to train and upgrade the skills of the indigenous craftsmen. The syllabus of all the colleges was modelled on the South Kensington pattern, which emphasized on art practice instead of theory.

Although the art schools were perceived to run against the deep-rooted grains of India's cultural traditions and practices, they did help train a whole generation of artists some of whom gained enough confidence to question the privileged position accorded to Western models, evoke nationalist ideologies, and initiate movements. The institutions also helped bring some of the indigenous styles especially the Kalighat *patuas* of Bengal into mainstream art. The new breed of artists began to apply newly learnt techniques to feature stories of rapidly evolving urban culture with humour. The artists from Madras, Tanjore, and Mysore started copying Western artists in their style and technique while others became good at making copies of the Western originals.

The printing press which reached Indian shores in the 16th century began to be used more widely. Later with the introduction of lithography and then photography in India, interesting dimensions to the scene were added by making images of artefacts held in museums across the world, hitherto inaccessible, available to Indian artists. This change made the early modernist artist's search for a personal idiom with a nationalistic verve even more vigorous. However, the trajectory of modernism in Indian art was a slow and complex process. Set against the backdrop of the colonial encounter, the Indian artist had to deal with the all-pervasive political turmoil with attendant ruptures in the socio-cultural fabric of the subcontinent and reflect it in his art. As the doors of perception opened, Western art historians too felt the need to look at Oriental art from its own historical and cultural perspectives, and not from the colonizer's.

The period also saw the emergence of the 'gentlemen Indian artists', mostly from affluent families and trained in Western oil painting techniques. They painted portraits, landscapes, still lifes and nudes in an attempt to emulate the mannerism as well as the methods of the British rulers. J. P. Gangooly and Annanda Bagchi fall into this category. But the most popular artist of this genre was Raja

Ravi Varma (1848–1906) from the royal family of Travancore in south India, who painted in a truly pan-Indian style and themes, while drawing on the Western techniques and tradition of realism. He successfully managed to combine the ornamental elements of Tanjore painting along with some interesting dramatic elements of Marathi and Parsi theatre into his oil portraits of people, divinities, and narratives based on mythological themes in a naturalistic way. His art work reflects the fusion of the East and West. A shrewd entrepreneur and marketing genius, he set up the Ravi Varma Fine Arts Lithographic Press to make oleographs of his art widely accessible at a reasonable price. His portrayal of gods and goddesses in human form were loved by the masses and his art became part of the 20th century middle-class Hindu homes across the country and even entered the realm of Indian cinema. Some critics critiqued his work as 'kitsch' and 'calendar' art and it is only recently that he has been validated as the trendsetter for contemporary Indian art practice.

In north India, it was Amrita Sher-Gil (1913–1941), country's first woman artist of stature, who brought about a substantial change in the sub-continental art scene. Her realistic paintings focused on the day-to-day life of people that she encountered in her father's palatial home in a village in Punjab and combined influences of Western oil painting practice with her own individual style. Although she was trained at the art academy in France and a substantial part of her short-lived life was spent in the West, her work remained rooted to India in its themes and thrust. Raja Ravi Varma and Amrita Sher-Gil were different in their personal and creative thrust. Ravi Varma's work was decorative and rooted in Indian mythology and folk art traditions while Amrita's work was more realistic focusing on the simple life of ordinary people. However, both combined Western oil painting practice in their own style and are widely regarded as pioneers of modern Indian art

In the first half of the 20th century, the momentum for independence and national definition became stronger, which led to several parallel developments in art practice. The art of Abdur Rehman Chughtai, Ismail Gulgee, Zainul Abedin, and their associates, stand apart for their distinct cultural identity as the revivalists took to inspiring nationalist projects that challenged British cultural hegemony. The institute set up by Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) in Shantineketan reasserted the idea of nationalism in Indian art, which was taken forward by Abanindranath Tagore (1871–1951). These two significant developments shaped the course of modern Indian art. Abanindranath Tagore who is widely regarded as the father of Modern Indian art movement turned to Japan and other Asian countries in search of a pan-Asian aesthetic that stood independent of the Western colonial. The Bengal School of Art developed by him and his contemporaries was taken up by many others, including Nandalal Bose (1882–1966) and Jamini Roy (1887–1972). Jamini Roy took the initiative a step further by rejecting Western academic training altogether and instead drew inspiration from the bazaar art and traditional folk painting called pat painting. The folk and tribal arts, often seen in a different light from the mainstream art of painting and sculpture were also influenced by the nationalist movement. The folk and tribal artists began to express their personal and social issues besides painting familiar images of fairs, festivals, and local deities in their works. The paintings, pottery, metalwork, weaving, jewellery, and other utility objects created by the folk artists were appreciated and collected by the ruling class, which helped the crafts to survive through a period of financial hardships given their low demand with the local population.

Given this nationalist thrust, modern Indian art started breaking away from its past and became a medium for portraying contemporary socio-political realities instead of indulging entirely in religion or romance. A vigorous art activism triggered by the devastation that followed the First World War and famine saw the artists mirroring angst in their work. Experimentations with Cubism, expressionism, and other art forms were relegated to the background, as the Indian artists focused more on re-linking with the roots in search of 'indigenous modernism'. Artists like Benode Behari Mukherjee and Ram Kinker Baij in addition to the ones mentioned earlier charted a fight for independence of the country and its art by using art as a political tool. The intellectual contribution of people like Ananda Coomaraswamy, the Tagores, and E.B. Havell (a connoisseur of Indian art and Principal of the Calcutta Art School) facilitated interactions at local and global levels with cities of Bombay and Calcutta at the centre. Caught in the sweep of the Swadeshi movement, the artist could no longer remain cocooned in a romantic world and some anguished art outpouring began to appear in the works of artists like Asit Kumar Halder and Hemen Mazumdar and others. It is this urge for nationalism and a search for individual modern identity that set the ground for progressive artists and other socialist cultural groups who helped shape the art of the sub-continent during the next few decades.

AN INDIAN LADY SMOKING A *HOOKAH*

The oriental beauty exquisitely dressed is seated on an European chair and holds the *hookah* (an Eastern smoking pipe), in one hand ready to take it to her lips while the other hand is delicately placed on her lap. The holy River Ganges forms the backdrop of the image. She is lady Muttubby, the companion of Ashraf Ali Khan, a well known resident of Patna. Artist Dip Chand of Murshidabad is said to have been commissioned to paint this portrait along with Ashraf Ali Khan by William Fullarton, a British surgeon stationed at Patna, who took keen interest in Mughal style of Indian painting. As illustrated here, local artists in response to European tastes began to include Western approaches to perspective in their work. They evolved a hybrid idiom called the Company School of Painting by depicting a more realistic imagery by using shadows and a more subtle palette and combining them with their own artistic traditions of figuration as reflected here. They even used Europeans as models. In this portrait, the horizon has been lowered by the artist and the transition from one colour to another with a corresponding change of locale in the scene has been achieved skillfully. In clear derivation from European paintings, which were often used as models, are the distant landscape and vanishing horizon featured in this painting.

ca. 1764
Artist: Attributed to Dip Chand
Opaque watercolour on paper
Dimensions: 20 x 13.1 cm
From Patna, Bihar
In the collection of the
British Library, London, UK

TIPU'S TIGER

The life-size semi-automated tiger-shaped sculpture in painted wood and metal with a mechanical organ fixed within its body was made for Tipu Sultan (1782–1799), the ruler of Mysore in south India. The tiger, which symbolizes Tipu Sutan, is shown pouncing on a European figure, suggestive of the British, who were trying to annexe Tipu's kingdom, which he defended valiantly for long. The organ concealed inside the tiger's body starts to play as the side handle is turned and this is when the prostrate man's arms start to move up and down as he wails in pain before falling dead. The tiger is seen sinking its teeth into the man's neck. A flap close to the handle opens to reveal organ pipes and button keys in ivory. This was discovered by the British in the music room of Tipu Sultan's palace after the siege of Seringapatam, the capital city.

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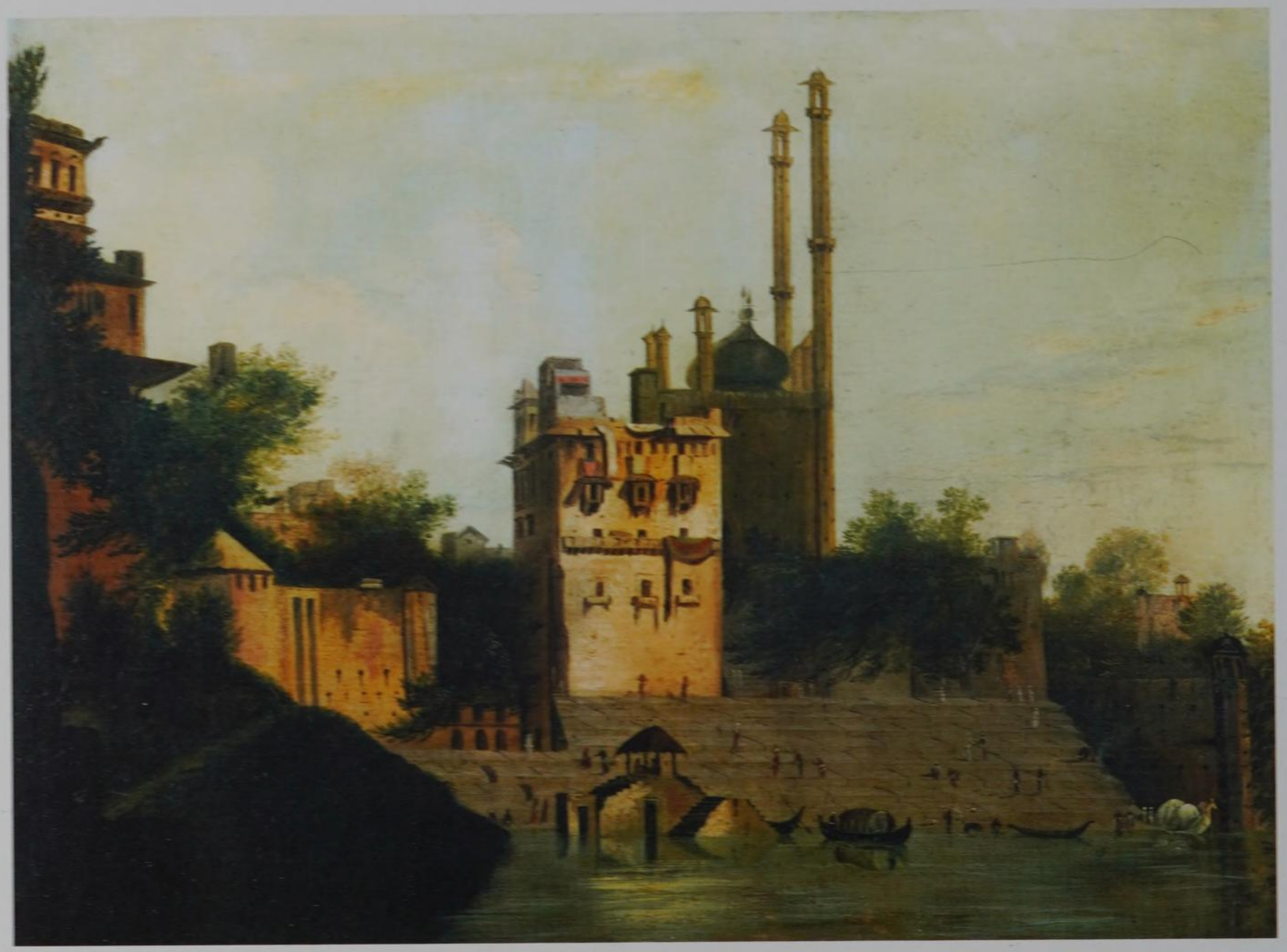
ca. 1793
Artist: Unknown
Mechanical organ, automaton, painted wood with metal fixtures
Dimensions: 178 x 71 x 61 cm
From Mysore, Karnataka, India
In the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK



A VIEW OF BENARES

William Hodges (1744 –1797) was the first British landscape painter to visit India. He sketched this scene when he visited the ancient city of Benares or Kashi, now known as Varanasi, as part of his Indian tour with the then Governor General Warren Hastings. The painting depicts temples and, pilgrims engaged in various rituals, and the *ghats* or steps being used for ceremonial bathing along the western bank of the holy River Ganges. Hodges painted the picture in his studio in London on his return from India. He worked from the sketches he had made in India. The compositional arrangement and the finish of the painting point to the European Neoclassical conventions. It looks more like a polished picturesque scene and not a strict topographical representation. Hodges' fascination with the continuum of Indian artistic traditions is reflected in his works (including this one), which won him widespread recognition as a landscape painter of the Company period.

ca 1781
Artist: William Hodges
Painting in watercolour on paper
Dimensions: 68.5x 91.5 cm
From north India
In the collection of the
British Library, London, UK

TAJ MAHAL AT AGRA

This image of the Taj Mahal is by Thomas Daniell (1749–1840) and William Daniell (1769–1837), an uncle and nephew duo who came to India in search of work. The painting was published in London and for a British audience in a portfolio entitled 'The Taje Mahal at Agra'. The aquatint presents a frontal view of the mausoleum that Emperor Shah Jahan got built as a memorial to his wife Mumtaz Mahal. The image captures the beauty of the architectural marvel with its water works and gardens laid out in accordance with the concept of the garden of paradise *Bag-e-bahisht* or *char bagh*. The main building featured in fine perspective at the far end is enhanced by a realistic rendering of the surrounding landscape and makes a fine visual record of the monument and its periphery. Study sketches for the work were made with the help of camera obscura in India and the aquatints were prepared in the artists' studio in London on their return. Thomas and William were fine engravers and together they produced six volumes of aquatints entitled 'Oriental Scenery' between 1795 and 1815.

ca. 1801
Artists: Thomas Daniell and William Daniell
Hand coloured etching with aquatint
Dimensions: Unknown
From London, UK
In private collection

JAMA MASJID

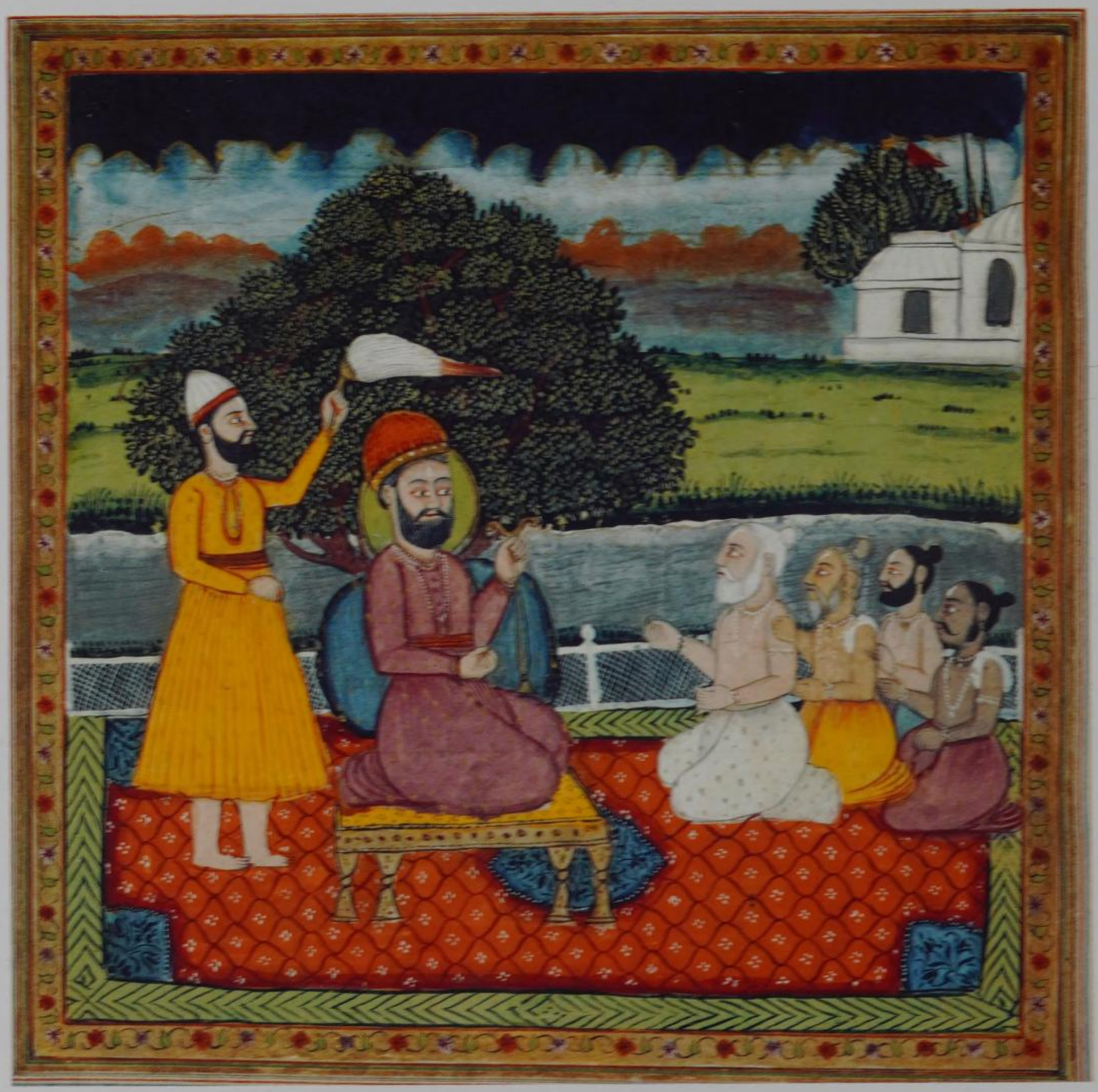
The painting features the Shahi Darwaza (royal entrance), also known as the Eastern Gateway of the famous Jama Masjid or Pearl Mosque at Shahjahanabad in old Delhi, as seen from an adjoining building. This was the gate that was used by the Mughal kings for their weekly prayers at the mosque. In preparation to the king's visit, the streets and pathways leading to the mosque were watered by men carrying *mashques* (leather water bags), to settle the dust and prepare the route for the king. The mosque was closed by the British administration and used as barracks for the Punjab infantry following the mutiny in 1857 and reopened for prayers only later. The picturesque painting with its perspective and fine draftsmanship captures the full glory of the great architectural masterpiece. Jama Masjid was built during the reign of Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan. This work was possibly commissioned by the British to document the historic monuments. The image is set against a vast vista; the scale of the image can be judged from the size of the men featured in the painting. The grandeur of the mosque is conveyed effectively through its gracefully arched entrance gateway and lofty minarets piercing the sky.

ca.1840
Artist: Mazhar Ali Khan
Painting in watercolour on paper
Dimensions: 13.5 x19 cm
From Delhi, India
In the collection of the
Victoria and Albert Museum,
London, UK

DANCING GIRLS AND MUSICIANS

This is a fine example of the Company School of Art patronized by British officers of the Raj. The composition is marked for its vivacity, a pan Indian feature of the art of the 18th and 19th centuries. It represents the hybrid pictorial style that features an exotic Indian imagery delineated especially by the local artists for their European masters. The mix of styles in terms of perspective, composition, and palette incorporates Western technique and draftsmanship but with a touch of Mughal grandeur and Rajput influences in its figuration, scene setting, and subject matter. The painting depicts beautifully attired and ornamented women together with male musicians, each in a different headdress. Some men are seated on the patterned carpet and others are standing under the canopy. The work was probably painted for a British client to take home as a souvenir, something to represent the 'Jewel in the Crown' that was India.

ca. 1830
Artist: Unknown
Painting in gouache on paper
Dimensions: 36 x 27.5 cm
In the collection of the
Victoria and Albert Museum,
London, UK



GURU NANAK AS A YOUNG MAN CONVERSING WITH HINDU HOLY MEN

Guru Nanak's ideology forms the basis of Sikh religion. Here the holy guru is seen seated on a low chair and conversing with a group of Hindu holy men and priests, as suggested by their attire. The scene is set on a terrace with a river flowing in the background. Nanak as the guru and preacher is larger in proportion and presence and appears on a higher platform as compared to the rest of the figures seated on the corner of the carpet. Clearly, size and other metaphors are used to indicate the importance and spiritual status of the characters. The halo behind Guru Nanak appears to have been added later possibly as an afterthought. The man standing behind Guru Nanak, probably Mardan, who accompanied Nanak on his travels, is seen fanning him with a fly-whisk, as a mark of respect and devotion— a practice that is carried on even today as the Sikh holy book, Guru Granth Sahib, is fanned by a fly-whisk.

ca. 1830
Artist: Unknown
Painting in opaque watercolour on paper
Dimensions: 31 x 31 cm
From Punjab, India
In the collection of the
British Library, London, UK

MAHARAJA DALIP SINGH

Maharaja Dalip Singh (1838–1893) was proclaimed the king of Punjab when he was just five years old, following the death of his father, Ranjit Singh. Dalip Singh was unjustly deposed by the British who annexed his state deceitfully and claimed all his property including the Kohinoor diamond, which is now a part of British Royal Crown. Dalip Singh is painted as a boy with soft cheeks, thin lips, and large eyes. He is seen seated on a chair with a rifle in his hand. The king appears innocent. His rich robes are in deep tones of purple, green, and red, and his regal look is enhanced with a jewelled choker, armbands, and bright red turban profusely decorated with *sarpench* (an embellished ornament), and several rows of pearls. The image was composed after the young boy was taken to England to keep him away from his state. The portrait shows the king wearing white gloves and encased in an oval frame, a style reflective of English miniature.

ca.1840
Artist: Probably Imam Bakhsh
Painting in gouache on paper
Dimensions: 18.7 x 25.8 cm
From Punjab, India
In the collection of the
Musée National des Arts Asiatiques-
Guimet, Paris, France

PASHMINA SHAWL

The exquisite Pashmina shawl was made on royal commission during the reign of Maharaja Ranbir Singh of Kashmir in the last quarter of the 19th century. The intricate imagery which includes a map of Srinagar diligently embroidered in silk thread incorporates elements of painting along with cartography. There are mountains, rivers, lakes, and architectural marvels depicted in varied colours. This rare shawl of high level of craftsmanship took several men working over a year to complete. It features a bird's-eye view of the scenic beauty of Srinagar, the capital of Kashmir. Pashmina is a fine, soft, lightweight, and warm wool of Himalayan goats that is highly cherished even today. The embroidery is done so neatly that it is reversible and usable on both sides. Pashmina shawls are worn both by men and women though men's shawls come in a larger size.

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ca. 1875–1885
Artist: Unknown
Shawl decorated with the map of Srinagar embroidered on Pashmina
Dimensions: 228.6 x 198.12 cm
From Kashmir, India
In the collection of the
Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK

HEAD OF BHIMA

The sculpture represents Bhima, one of the Pandava brothers and an important character from the celebrated epic *Mahabharata*. He was known for his legendary prowess. The stylized head of the warrior-hero in polychromed wood was probably a part of an ensemble including Bhima's arms and legs, which are now missing. The colourful head is topped by a multi-tiered crown with a pot-shaped form placed at the apex, and each tier is decorated with a different and intricate pattern. The head is painted in bright, primary colours and has bulging eyes, elongated ears, and bared teeth conveying Bhima's immense strength and potency—typical qualities ascribed to him. Bhima and other heroes from the *Mahabharata* in painted wood were mounted on wheeled chariots and pulled around villages of Kerala and coastal Karnataka, with people joining the procession in veneration to the deities. This practice is followed even today.

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ca. 19th century
Artist: Unknown
Sculpture in polychromed wood
Dimensions: 100 x 43 cm
From southern Kerala, India
In the collection of
Michael and Henrietta Spink Ltd.,
London, UK

RADHA AND MADHAVA

Raja Ravi Varma (1848–1906), started as a society portraitist but graduated to become the harbinger of change by ushering in the age of Indian modernism by working on indigenous classical and mythological themes and Sanskrit literary texts in a Western realistic style with easels and oils. This painting features the mythological couple Radha and Madhava or Lord Krishna engaged in a conversation. The naïve Radha dressed in a red sari is seen sitting under the tree with her *pallu* or veil falling down baring her fulsome breasts under the blue *choli* or blouse, as her head is thrown back, hands up, and eyes looking up to Madhava who is standing behind and admiring her lissom form and beauty. Krishna's peacock feather, yellow attire, posturing, and the look in his eyes make the image of divine union set against the background of a flowing river and lush green landscape very picturesque. Such decorative artwork painted in rich palette was produced in large numbers as oleographs often described as calendar art, which helped Ravi Varma gain instant popularity with the masses.

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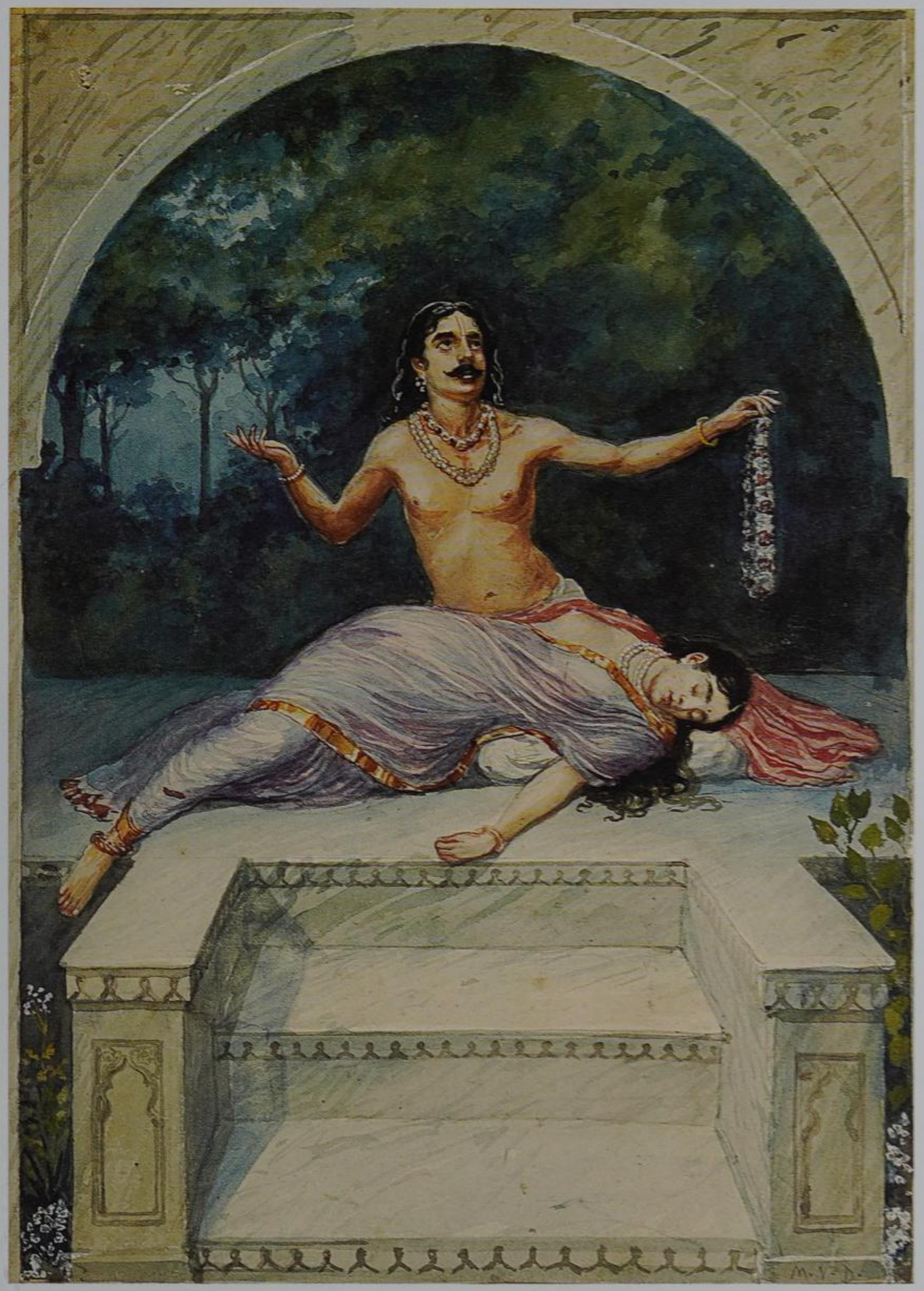
ca.1870
Artist: Raja Ravi Varma
Painting oil on canvas
Dimensions: 20.32 x 30.48 cm
From Mysore, Karnataka, India
In the collection of the
Maharaja Fateh Singh Museum in Baroda, Gujarat, India



AJA VILAP

Mahadev Visvanath Dhurandhar also known as Rao Bahadur (1867–1944), lived in Mumbai and headed the famous Sir J. J. School of Art in the city. Besides teaching, he continued with his own work as an artist and produced a vast body of work including figurative paintings, murals, and illustrations that documented the city of Mumbai and its people, scenes from Hindu mythology, Omar Khayyam series, and 'Women at Work'. The influences of the Company School of Art and Raja Varma style are evident in his art that appears in a fine blend of popular commercial art and academic realism that resonate with vernacular values and English decorum. Aja Vilap depicts the pathos of the mythological King Aja as he grieves over the sudden loss of his wife Indumati, the celestial damsel. The visual is based on Kalidasa's poetic description of the 15th century narrative in the epic poem *Raghuvamsha*. The painting is semi-autobiographical as Dhurandhar himself had lost his first wife at a young age. The composition shows Aja holding the garland in his left hand and looking up to the heavens seeking its divine intervention to bring his wife, Indumati, back to life. The facial expressions of the protagonists and their drapes, painted in flat and transparent colours add a touch of melancholic beauty and romance to the imagery.

ca. early 20th century
Artist: M.V.Dhurandhar
Watercolour on paper
Dimensions: 33.5 x 23.4cm
From Mumbai, Maharashtra, India
In the collection of the
Delhi Art Gallery, New Delhi, India

GROUP WITH NAWAB AZMUTH, JUNG BAHADUR'S SON IN PALANQUIN

This image was shot by Lala Deen Dayal (1844-1905), initially a draughtsman in the Indore Public Works Secretariat. He later became one of the most famous photographers of modern India. He was appointed first as the court photographer to the sixth Nizam of Hyderabad and he later worked for Lord Curzon. His subjects ranged from historical figures to landmark events of the British Raj. The photograph shows the young *nawab* being carried by a retinue of servants in a palanquin. The interesting details in the photograph are the costumes worn by the men including their *pagadi* or turban and the various objects that they carry, which would be presented to the young nawab on his arrival at the destination. Deen Dayal's photographs bring to life the society of the time and are widely appreciated for their markedly Indian and painterly qualities.

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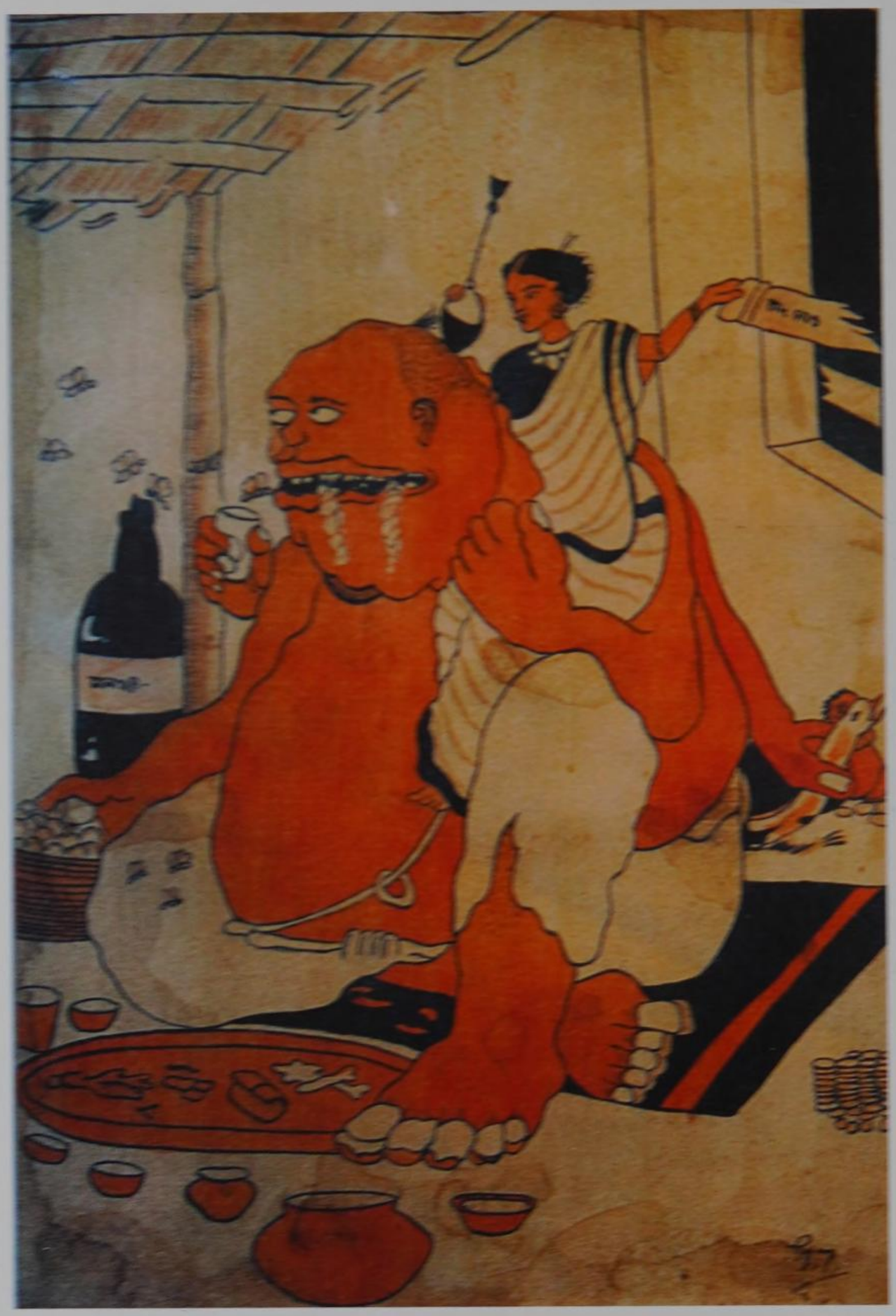
ca. 1898
Artist: Lala Deen Dayal
Bromide print from a glass plate original photographic negative
Dimensions: Variable
From Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh, India
In the collection of the
Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, New Delhi, India



UNTITLED

Gagnendranath Tagore (1867–1938) was a member of the illustrious Tagore family. He was primarily a self-trained artist and counted amongst the earliest modernists of Indian art. Although he appreciated the aesthetics of the Bengal School, he evolved his own distinct style of painting that seems to have been impacted by his exposure to art practices–ranging from the Japanese wash technique to the European cubistic expressionist trends– from around the world. He worked in various forms and themes and executed each painting in a different style and technique ranging from portraits, sketches, illustrations, nature studies, and caricatures. This painting falls in the last category. It shows a pot-bellied priest feasting himself sick much to the amazement by the lady of the house. A sense of humour combined with satire on the erosion of moral values appears in this caricaturist rendering that is painted in a rich palette.

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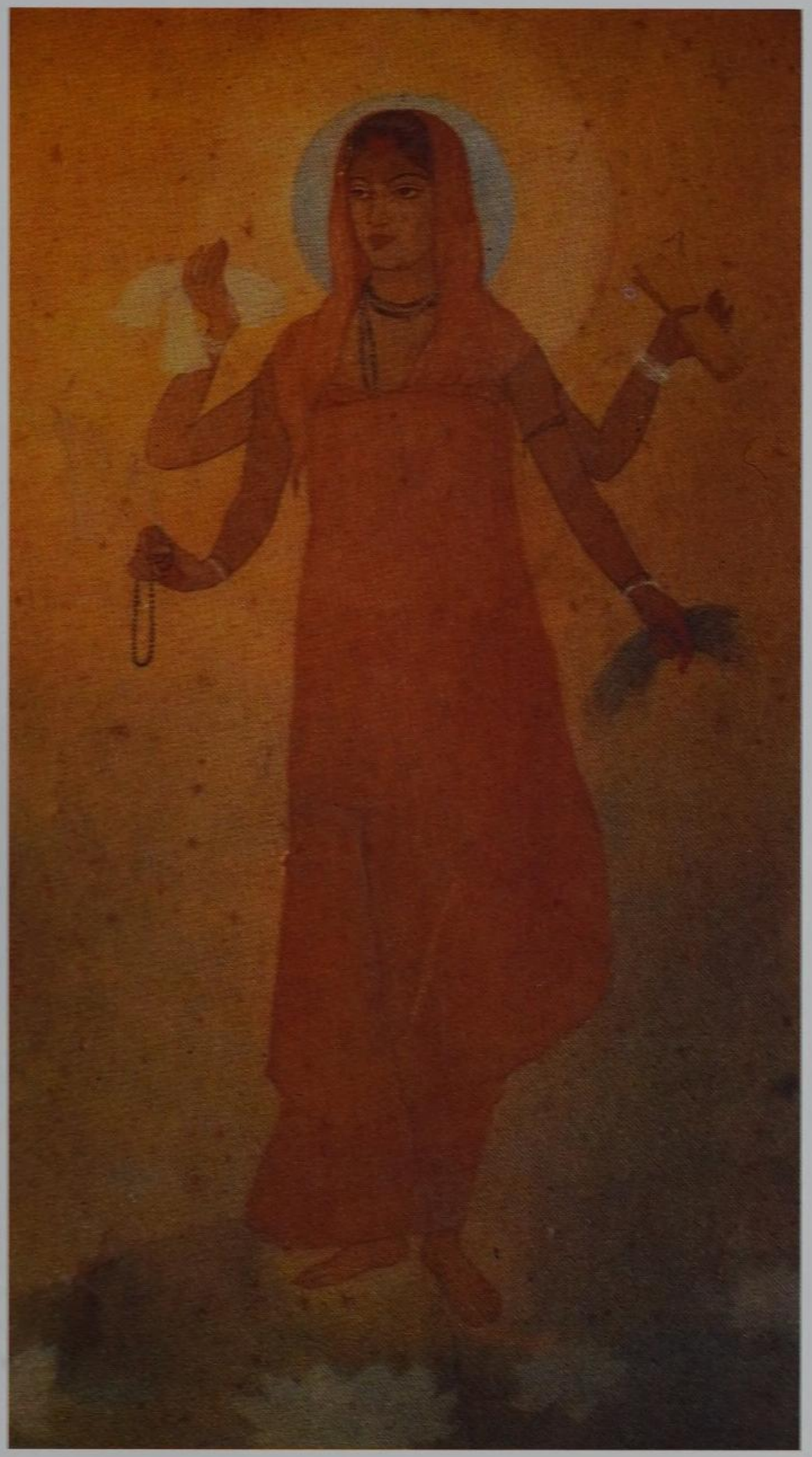
ca. early 20th century
Artist: Gagagnendranath Tagore
Painting in watercolour, pen, and ink on paper
Dimensions: 17.5 x 25 cm
From Bengal, India
In the private collection of Siddharth Tagore



BHARAT MATA

Bharat Mata by Abanindranath Tagore (1871–1951) is not an ordinary Indian woman. She is a celestial goddess surrounded by a nimbus and stands on the edge of a lotus pond. Dressed in an orange sari with her four arms out-stretched, she appears calm and aglow with an inner strength. The style is rooted in the early Bengal School of Art. This Bharat Mata was painted in the backdrop of the Swadeshi Movement, which was a movement for national awakening against British imperialism. She is seen carrying different objects in her four hands, symbolic of the nationalistic aspirations of the time: *anna*, or rice or grain for self-sufficiency in food, *vastra* or cloth for self-respect, *shiksha* or secular learning represented by the manuscript, and *diksha* or spiritual learning represented by rosary. The *hashiya* or border which frames the painting is derived from Mughal miniatures while the wash technique of colouring is of Japanese origin. This was Abandindranath's way of rejecting everything Western in favour of what was Indian and Oriental.

ca. 1905
Artist: Abanindranath Tagore
Painting in watercolours and wash on paper
Dimensions: 26.67 x 15.24 cm
From Bengal, India
In the collection of
Rabindra Bharati Society,
Kolkata, West Bengal, India

UNTITLED

Nandalal Bose (1882–1966) was a notable Indian painter of Bengal School of Art who headed the Kala Bhawan at Santiniketan for several years. He was under the tutelage of the Tagore family and was influenced by the murals of Ajanta. Nandalal's work entails a classical streak with a contemporary touch. His paintings, which depict scenes from mythology, women, and village life, reflect a distinct Indian style as is reflected in this painting. The painting of the young woman is a masterly figuration. It represents his style that is renowned for its oriental beauty and decorative streak. The palette depicts a pretty maid's dress painted in shimmering shades of pink, her face, features, and arms are painted in skin tones, her curly flowing hair is jet black, set against a yellow light with dark sky in the distant horizon. The skillful rendering by the artist makes this a remarkable composition like his many others. He is acknowledged as the leading light of the renaissance of art in India. Nandalal Bose's black on white linocut print that featured Mahatma Gandhi walking with a staff as a mark of his protest against British tax on salt became an iconic image of the non-violent movement. He was the founder member of the Indian Society of Oriental Art and credited for sketching the emblems for Indian national awards.

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ca. 1910s
Artist: Nandalal Bose
Lithograph print
Dimensions: 35.6 x 25.4cm
From Bengal, India
In the collection of the
Delhi Art Gallery, New Delhi, India

UNTITLED

Jamini Roy (1887–1972) was a pioneer who gave a new direction to the art of modern India by evolving his idiom of expression out of Bengal's folk and tribal painting and discarding the Western academic and decadent Neo-Bengal school styles. His work embodied simplicity and a unique Indian identity. The painting depicts a woman poised classically, which could be interpreted as either offering prayers to God or in a dancing *mudra* or mode. She has a thin waist and is dressed in stylized and colourful costume with an elaborate hairdo, jewellery, and fish-shaped eyes. She appears more as a decorative motif than a realistic figurative image. The earthy palette and simple bold forms in rapid lines and expressive contours that fill up the space reveal the artist's sophisticated approach to his art with its genesis in folk forms of the region.

ca. 1930–1940
Artist: Jamini Roy
Painting gouache on paper
Dimensions: 31 x 55 cm
From Bengal, India
In the collection of the
Art Konsult Gallery, New Delhi, India

UNTITLED

Born in Lahore, Abdur Rahman Chughtai (1897–1975) was a hereditary artist of Persian descent. He was primarily self-trained. He learnt painting from his uncle, Baba Mira Baksh, at home. His work, which is mainly figurative in its metier reflects influences of the Mughal and Bengal schools. The couple featured are shown sitting in a pavilion or possibly under a canopy. The woman is holding a garland or a rosary and the man looking at her in admiration. Both are elegantly dressed in regional costumes. The drawing in pencil represents an interesting example of his genre that combines features of Mughal miniature painting together with early 20th century European art Nouveau and Japanese influences. Given his sense of line, scale, and form and an intellectual bent of mind, Chughtai also designed postal stamps and various insignia for Pakistan, besides illustrating books. He was commissioned by the Maharani of Cooch Behar to paint a series on Ghalib's poetry. He was himself an avid art collector and a founder member of the Pakistan Art Council.

ca: 1930–1940
Artist: A. R. Chughtai
Drawing in pencil and pen on paper
Dimensions: 16.5 x 17cm
From Lahore, Pakistan
In the collection of the
Delhi Art Gallery, India

UNTITLED

Narayan Ramakrishna Sardesai (1885–1954) studied at the Sir J. J. School of Art in Mumbai and taught drawing at a school in the city for a living besides continuing to work on his art. Drawing and carpentry skills that he had learnt as a child in Maharashtra, had impacted his paintings. He often depicted the sacred geography and landscape of a not-yet independent India in his work. His paintings—be it in oil, watercolour, pencil, or charcoal—received critical acclaim for their expert draftsmanship. This is a beautiful and pleasant composition that features a countryside landscape in transparent watercolours with the hills in the background set against the distant skyline. The terrace and its railing, the two strategically located trees and their shadow on the meandering pathway, the flower pots with red and white lilies, suggest that the locale could be the outdoors of a large bungalow on the outskirts of a city. The picturesque view reflects the artist's sharp sense of observation, the accuracy in his drawing, and his expertise in playing with form and colour with imaginative realism.

ca.1938
Artist: Narayan Ramkrishna Sardesai
Painting in watercolour on paper
Dimensions: 22.1 x 30.5 cm
From Mumbai, Maharashtra, India
In the collection of the
Delhi Art Gallery, India

PORTRAIT OF A LADY

This painting by Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) like most of his other works appears in a simplistic style. Tagore, the Noble Laureate poet credited with setting up the Viswa Bharati University at Santiniketan took to art later in life and all of his nearly 3, 000 drawings and paintings were produced during the last fifteen years of his life. Rabindranath was not a formally trained artist but his spontaneity and sensibility lend his paintings a distinct warmth. Faces of women marked for their dark haunting oeuvre is a recurring feature in his work. It is believed that the death of his young sister-in-law with whom he enjoyed a special comradeship might be the reason behind this distinctive oeuvre. His repertoire includes doodles, drawings, and paintings featuring men, heads, masks, birds, beasts, flowers, and mystic landscapes daubed and smeared with colours and ink on paper with a free abundance.

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ca. 1935–1940
Artist: Rabindranath Tagore
Watercolour and crayon on paper,
Dimensions: 35.6 x 25.4cm
From Bengal, India
In the collection of the
Delhi Art Gallery, India

THREE GIRLS

Amrita Sher-Gil (1913–1941) is regarded amongst the pioneers of modern Indian art in the genre of post impressionist colourful imagery. Her work featured simple rural Indian folk especially women whom she encountered in and around her father's palatial home at Saraya village in Punjab. She combined influences of the British oil painting tradition with her individually evolved style using rich colours particularly red. This was Amrita Sher-Gil's first major painting on return to India following her formal study of art in Paris which marked her move away from the academic style of painting. The plainly dressed women painted in dark tones with their heads elegantly covered are at the threshold of adulthood and of 'marriageable age' as per the prevalent social order. They appear in a close foreground, sans any surroundings, which is typical of her work. Their passive posturing and resigned expressions articulate their inner plight and predicament, which is depicted with empathy. The melancholic demeanor of the simple figures diligently drawn and painted is heightened in the elongated vertical composition that evokes a mixed sense of dignity and pathos.

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ca. 1935
Artist: Amrita Sher-Gil
Oil on canvas
Dimensions: 98 x 72.5 cm
Possibly from Saraya, Punjab, India
In the collection of the
National Gallery of Modern Art,
New Delhi, India

UNTITLED

Zainul Abedin (1914–1976), studied in Kolkata before moving to Bangladesh, where he lived for the rest of his life. He was honoured as *shilpacharya* or great teacher of the arts for his pioneering work as an artist and an art teacher. Nature is a recurrent theme in his work given that his childhood was spent near the scenic banks of the Brahmaputra river. He was a renowned watercolourist but also made pen and ink drawings like the one featured here. The two birds are drawn and painted realistically. They seem to be waiting for something or someone—each looking expectantly in a different direction. This work seems to resonate with pathos that runs as an undercurrent in his work, which he had created following the Bengal Famine of 1943, which had moved him deeply. Zainul Abedin was at the forefront of the cultural movement to re-establish the Bengali identity in Bangladesh. He used Chinese ink, watercolour, and wax to create art works that celebrated the ongoing Non-Cooperation Movement. Abedin also founded the Folk Art Museum at Sonargaon near Dhaka.

ca. mid 20th century
Artist: Zainul Abedin
Watercolour and ink on paper
Dimensions: 35 x 25 cm
From east India
In the private collection of
Siddharth Tagore

HEAD OF RABINDRANATH TAGORE

Ramkinkar Baij (1906–1980) hailed as the pioneer of modern Indian sculpture, headed the sculpture department at Kala Bhawan, Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan. With his roots in Santhal tribal art traditions, he was able to bring ethnic Indian artistic practises in alignment with contemporary Western techniques. His zest for life is reflected in his sculptures and paintings that centre on the human figure. The portrait here comes in a semi-abstract and somewhat dramatic form depicting human emotions through body dynamics, a prominent feature of his work. The sculpture made with easily accessible local material is skillfully modelled and carved. It demonstrates that the artist valued and understood his material and knew how to play with it to create evocative forms like this. The Head of Rabindranath Tagore is filled with enigma and interesting expressionist dimensions. It also depicts Ramkinkar Baij's ability to handle human form in figuration as well as abstraction with equal force and vitalty. There is another large statue of Rabindranath Tagore on display at Santiniketan, besides several life-size sculptures of Indian freedom fighters along with his renowned composition 'Santhal Family' in sand and pebble.

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ca. 1938
Artist: Ram Kinker Baij
Sculpture in cement
Dimensions: 49.5 x 26.7 cm
From Bengal, India
In the collection of the
Delhi Art Gallery, New Delhi, India

Contemporary Indian Art

1947 to Present

Laxma Goud, Untitled, pen, ink, and gouache on paper, ca. 1990s
Paresh Maity, Echo, oil on canvas, 2003 (facing page)

The story of Indian art having meandered through several millennia and myriad influences opens with a new chapter in 1947 to a vast vista of an independent entity and in a collage of multiple forms, themes, materials, and narratives. The highly charged atmosphere of a nascent democracy that had just been liberated from British rule had been a witness to the trauma of partition, which laid the fertile ground for the art scene that burgeoned during the following several decades.

The significant exception to the art affected by the trauma was the Progressive Artists' Group formed in 1947 at Bombay. It stood apart in its search for an internationally valid creative idiom. M.F. Husain, S.H. Raza, and Francis Newton Souza, were three of its six founding members. Although the group dissolved in 1956 with two prominent members finding greater fame abroad, it left a profound impact on Indian art until the end of 20th century. The members of this group who were known for their Marxist leanings worked in a Parisian abstract expressionistic genre and worked towards liberating Indian art from the constraints of a rigid nationalist agenda and derivative formulaic patterns. Husain who was one of the most popular and controversial Indian artists of his generation was exposed to European and other international art trends. He worked in several different modes and all his works were based on indigenous traditions and popular Indian culture including cinema. Souza on the other hand, worked in a mix of Surrealist, Cubist, and Primitive styles and gained international success for his erotic nudes and religious paintings. Raza who shifted his focus from landscapes to tantric *mandalas* and geometric patterns has remained rooted to indigenous themes despite the group's purported search for an open, international outlook. Likewise, a few other renowned members of the group worked in different genres, for example, V. S. Gaitonde is known for his pure abstraction, Krishen Khanna for his narrative art, and Akbar Padamsee for his luminous landscapes and arresting figuration.

The early 1950s saw many disparate artistic streams running in parallel. P. T. Reddy and his group known as 'Young Turks', initiated a shift of focus from image to technique and innovation, and a commitment to secular practices in art. The Shilpi Chakra, which was set up in 1950 in Delhi by Bhabesh Chandra Sanyal, a remarkable painter, sculptor, and organizer attempted to deal with the urgent political compulsions of the times by breaking free from the stultifying confines of static realism and launching a quest for an assimilation of the local with global and modernity with internationalism. Shanti Dave and Satish Gujral are a couple of the prominent members of the group. Sanyal is also credited with leading the art department at Delhi Polytechnic in 1952 and inviting luminaries like Sailoz Mookerjea, Somnath Hore, and others to join the faculty. The polytechnic is

Dileep Sharma, Banana Brother, watercolour on paper, 2007
Ram Kumar, Untitled, oil on canvas, 1976 (facing page)

responsible for training several contemporary artists like Anupam Sud who is one of the finest contemporary printmakers and Satish Gupta, known for his sculptures.

J. Swaminathan is another contemporary artist that deserves a special mention here. He is not only renowned for his exquisite abstract paintings but also for leading a unique initiative at Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal, that brought contemporary art in an interface with tribal and folk cultures of the country. He rejected the hybrid mannerisms as they were not in tune with the Indian ethos. The Madras art society with members like K. C. S. Paniker, K. G. Ramanujam, and S. G. Vasudev focused on incorporating indigenous traditions into their artistic practice while searching for a regional identity, which was subsequently articulated in the formation of the Cholamandal Artists' Village in the 1960s. The artists attempted to distil an Indian idiom through rural handicraft traditions and textile designs. Meera Mukherjee worked with the tribal dokhra style of metal casting to create bronze sculptures while artists like Biren De and G.R. Santosh turned to abstraction in Tantric art.

Sankho Chaudhuri, Nasreen Mohamedi, Gulammohammed Sheikh, Jyoti Bhatt, and Bhupen Khakhar enriched the contemporary art scene with their experiments in abstraction, pop, and narrative art. Many graduates from the M. S. University, Baroda such as Vivan Sundaram and Dhruva Mistry have gained international acclaim for their contribution to art while scholars such as Geeta Kapoor and Shivaji K. Panikkar have set new paradigms for debates on art history and art criticism.

In Bengal, the Kala Bhavan at Visva-Bharati University in Santiniketan and Government College of Art in Kolkata have been the centres where some of the country's best known contemporary artists are trained. A few of the notable artists from these centres include Sarbari Roy Chowdhury known for his semi-realistic forms and figures; Bikash Bhattacharjee and Shuvaprasanna credited for their realistic imagery of Kolkata and its people; Sakti Burman the creator of folk-inspired dreamscapes; Jogen Chowdhury, famous for his mutilated forms in cross hatching; Lalu Prasad Shaw and Suhas Roy for their lyrical work; and Paritosh Sen and K. G. Subramanyan for their witty, ironic figurative statements through art. The Sir J. J. School of Arts in Mumbai; Government College of Art, Chandigarh; and the Delhi College of Arts continue to be breeding grounds that facilitate the growth of Indian art focusing on individual aesthetics as opposed to a collective one.

This multifarious artistic development got a further shot in the arm with the establishment of Lalit Kala Akademi, the national academy of art at Delhi in 1954, followed by its regional centres at a time when the art market was non-existent. This further helped the work of luminary artists of the era between the 1950s and 1980s: Manu Parekh, known for his Varanasi *ghat* scenes, A. Ramachandran for his rooted imagery, and Prabhakar Kolte for his colourful abstractions. The emergency and the Naxal movement in the turbulent 1970s was the political backdrop against which Indian art with artists like Tyeb Mehta, Laxma Goud, Shuvaprasanna, Arpita Singh, Neelima Sheikh, and Arpana Caur got intensely engaged with the current issues around socio-economic political realities. The post-independence era artists with a newfound confidence in themselves and their work broke free from the earlier political compulsions and artistic constraints, opting for experimentation in styles and media to capture life, its fleeting moments, and current issues and events.

The art scenario gets even more proliferative and innovative from the 1990s, as reflected in the refreshingly exciting and fairly striking ideation in the work of the younger generation of today's artists. With India getting progressively engaged with the globalized world and opening up its economy and the new media invading the private and the public space, the artists' mind-frame is evolving as well. The post-modern liberalization phase has not only freed the creator from the constraints of two-dimensionality, it has also facilitated a free play in terms of size and scale of art being produced in different genres. The existing boundaries between painting, sculpture, design, installation, and performing arts are being dismantled. There is linking of art with craft, commerce with fine art, and local with global; thus, opening up the scope for experimentation. All these developments get reflected not only in the art from around the country in varied media but also in the focus, conceptualization, imagery, and techniques. Ranbir Kaleka, Chintan Upadhyay, Atul Bhalla, Riyas Komu, and Sonia Khurana are a few artists who have produced some compelling art works bordering on art activism by using an assortment of media, methods, and modes, occasionally weaving self into their experiments.

The seeds laid in the 20th century nurtured the art scene flowering in the first eleven years of the 21st century. Issues and preoccupations which were the focus of the previous generation of artists faded into oblivion as younger artists not just the privileged few from the major metros but also from more humble backgrounds and mofussil India begin to turn glo-cal spurred by blurred borders, globalized economy, and wider access to opportunities and a range of media. In one way or another, much of the current artistic expression converges around the all-pervasive information explosion and issues concerning the individual versus society or private against public. One such artist who has elevated the local to a global plane through his art is Subodh Gupta who hails from Bihar, which is considered to be the backyard of India. Jitish Kallat, Bharti Kher, and the Thukral and Tagra duo, all have found radical new directions in their artistic language that overlaps with socio-political comments on homegrown and world events. As the currents of change flow fast and far in the Indian art world, artists present us with a paradoxical situation which challenges the notion of beauty by wrapping up the ugliness of a situation in seductive and dynamic imagery. Here, the concept and development process of the work is often as engaging as the final art work.

The stage is clearly taken over by a younger generation of artists who though conscious of their native history do not feel over-burdened by it. The free flow across forms and media has clearly brought forth a refreshing hybrid genre of art, crafts, architecture, design, photography, hyper-realism, digital representations, videos, installation, performance art, and new media creations besides paintings, sculptures, prints, and performance art amongst others. This genre is scrutinized, magnified, or reinterpreted, and highly appreciated by a more diffused audience. Issues such as sexuality, regional identity, corruption, denial, violence, and concern for environment are addressed by the artists with women artists shedding their self-imposed confines of work around feminist themes to engage their creative energies on wider issues of human interest. The contemporary artists break free from the old-fashioned practice of restricting art to decorative imagery or rigid disciplinary conventions by being innovative with ideas, materials, media, and everyday objects. They make larger-than-life works for open spaces, bringing art into the wider public arena for pleasure and reflection. Some of the artists' studios are equipped with technical facilities like factory assembly lines with skilled staff assisting the master creator. The artists also work collaboratively by taking up residencies and working in partnership with each other.

The appreciation and demand for art has been running in parallel with the profusion of art galleries, auction houses, art entrepreneurs, funds, and showcases of Indian art throughout the country and internationally. The high aesthetic merits combined with escalating market value have added to the vibrancy of the contemporary Indian art scene. There is also an increase in opportunity and demand for discourses on art with the emergence of platforms for rigorous critical approach. The School of Art & Aesthetics at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, and art magazines like *Art India*, *Art & Deal*, and *Art Etc*. complement catalogues that the galleries bring out to support their exhibitions. Private museums like the Devi Art Foundation and Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, both in Delhi, provide alternate space for suitable display of digital, video, and site specific art, besides paintings and sculptures. The triennials and biennales happening in Delhi and other major cities in India as well as participation of private galleries from India in major art fairs abroad have helped draw international attention to Indian art. The India Art Fair, now in its fourth edition in January 2012., signifies the arrival of contemporary Indian art on the international mainstream cultural arena.

The Indian artist of today is a versatile creative individual, focused on ideas, narratives, and concepts paying equal attention to delineation, composition, texture and finesse, and not just the palette or the form. The artist also is extremely heterogeneous, a globetrotting celebrity, and a savvy networker extending the reach and influence of his art beyond the national borders, just like artists elsewhere in the world. This comes from being extremely comfortable and equally at ease with oneself at home and the world. The story takes us to a point where Indian art though clearly rooted, no longer hankers for old history; it makes one, right here and right now.

NUDE WITH FRUIT

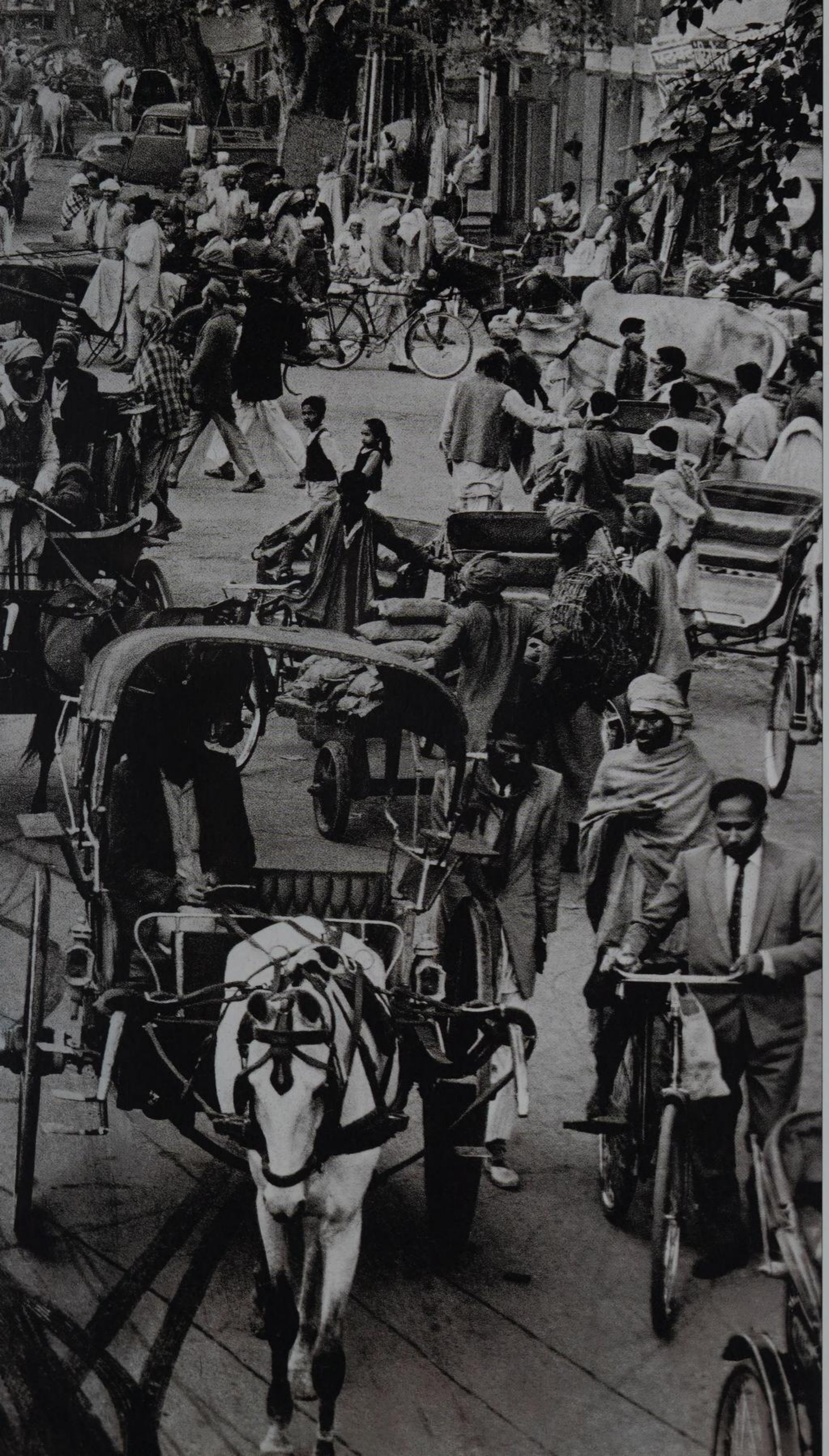
The Indian artist Francis Newton Souza (1924–2002), commonly referred to as F. N. Souza or Souza, was a founder member of the Progressive Artists' Group, which creativity remained anchored to Western modernism while simultaneously staying rooted to the indigenous Indian oeuvre. He was a compulsive rebel, who moved his base from Mumbai to London and then to New York. He is best known for his inventive human forms with bold lines and drawings of circles and hatchings especially the heads. His forms continued to rotate on themes connected with his faith, erotic nudes, mother and child, still life, and landscapes. This compelling composition combines his talent for drawing erotic nudes with painting still life images, the two subjects that he is best remembered for besides his paintings of Christ. A still calmness pervades the work, an emotion atypical of Souza's work. Precise line work and a pastel palette with smooth brush strokes endow this work with a special appeal.

1958
Artist: Francis Newton Souza
Painting oil on board
Dimensions: 121.9 x 91.4 cm
In the collection of the
Kiran Nadar Museum, New Delhi, India

UNTITLED

Akbar Padamsee (b.1928) is one of the early pioneer artists of the 1940's who forged a new modernist style in Indian art. He was trained in Paris and is well versed in philosophy and the *Upanishads*. Padamsee's creative repertoire includes experimentation in film-making, photography, digital art, sculpture, and art criticism apart from painting. His treatment of human form, be it Christ-like figures or his nudes is evocative of solitude and sexuality while his abstract 'metascapes' and landscapes are cerebral and sensual. In a distinct artistic streak, this painting appears immersed in a riot of colours—the dark browns, blacks, and greens are set against bright yellows and tender blues. The clouds and dark sky hovering above the mountains seem to play a game of hide and seek as different forms coalesce on his canvas. The deft handling of the space, form, and palette in this landscape lends the imagery a visually seductive and intellectually stimulating oeuvre.

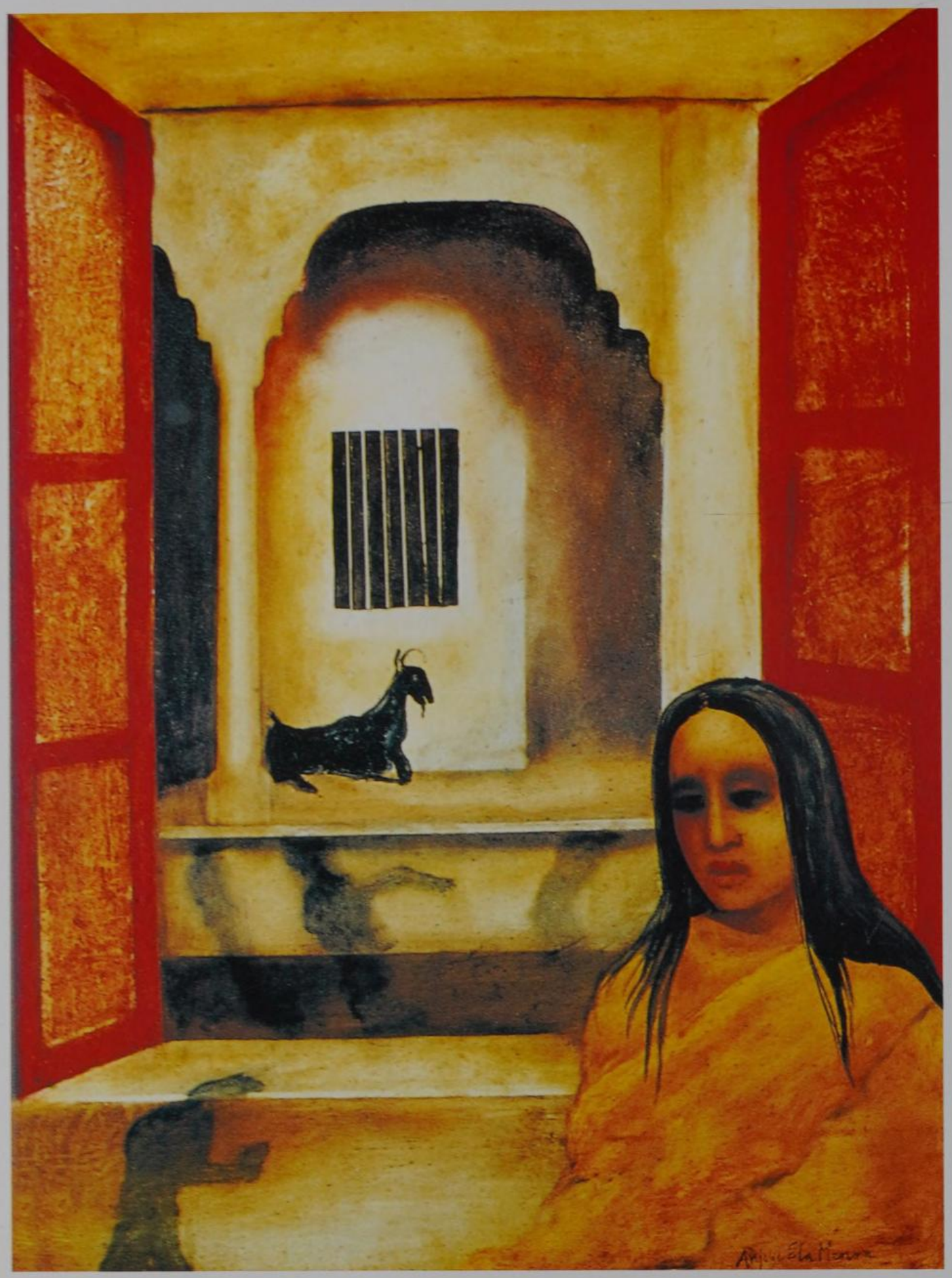
1964
Akbar Padamsee
Oil on canvas
Dimensions: 99.1 x 99.1 cm
In the collection of the
Delhi Art Gallery, New Delhi, India



TRAFFIC AT CHAWRI BAZAR, DELHI

Raghu Rai (b. 1942) is a photographer and photo-journalist renowned for his intriguing and spontaneous images that entertain, question, and even disturb. He has captured some of the most significant events in the country's recent history. He was the first photographer on the scene after the 1984 Bhopal industrial disaster. He has produced acclaimed documentary series on Mother Teresa, the Dalai Lama, and the late Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. The image here represents another group of his work that features the daily life in India, and its social and humane side with affection and humour. The composition captures the hectic busy scene and traffic at Chawri Bazar (marketplace) in Delhi where rickshaw pullers and overloaded carts jostle for space with humanity. The clarity of his composition, the true spirit of the goings-on, and the thrill of the moment are effectively caught in this shot taken on the run.

1964
Artist: Raghu Rai
Photographic print in k 3 pigment ink on fine art archival paper
Dimensions: 50.8 x 76.2 cm
In the private collection of the artist



DARIBA

Anjolie Ela Menon (b.1940) is one of India's leading contemporary women artists. Her paintings appear animated and reveal an extraordinary sensibility. Her subjects, which are Indian in essence seem to dwell in some undefined spheres—nudes, interiors, and landscapes—that represent her everyday encounters. The painting here features her typical portrait— innocent and haunted—immersed in her captivating patina and encased in a door frame, as if attempting to peep at the world outside. The scene and the goat is a familiar sight for the artist on her way through the busy by-lanes from her home to the studio. The imagery is distilled to reveal passage of life and experiences filled with imagination and colours. Some of Anjolie's work also features self-portrait and paintings of friends and family. The artist who is a keen observer and innovative in spirit, has experimented in various media including glass and digital work, kitsch and decorative objects. She has also painted on several panelled doors and windows, amongst other things.

1980
Artist: Anjolie Ela Menon
Oil on Masonite
Dimensions: 122 x 92 cm
In the collection of the artist

SPEAKING STREET

Gulammohammed Sheikh (b. 1937), taught art history and painting besides writing and researching on traditional arts. He is the leading modern artist in the narrative-figurative genre. The city has been a leitmotif for much of Sheikh's remarkable work with some autobiographical content and social commentary. 'Speaking Street' invites the viewer to look into the interiors of homes and courtyards of the city street and the frozen desires and loneliness of its inhabitants aside from the commotion of the by-lanes. Located in Sheikh's hometown Baroda, the painting echoes the chaos and brutalization of street life. Dated 1981, the composition is reflective of the communal strife prevalent in India at that time. It includes architectural elements —walls, rooftops, doors, stairways, and minarets painted in a vivid palette. This work explores layered narratives with 'multiplicities and simultaneity' of the public–private interface in an Indian *mohalla* (locality). The harshness of the built structure offset by some lilting green in the distance is reflective of the artist's engagement with indigenous arts of India especially Mughal miniatures.

1981
Artist: Gulammohammed Sheikh
Painting in oil on canvas
Dimensions: 122.7 x 103 cm
In the collection of the
Roopankar Museum of Fine Arts,
Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal, India

NIGHT FALL

Borders, geographies, displacement, home, and identity have been the recurrent themes of Zarina Hashmi's work in the abstract genre. Hashmi's minimalist and ethereal work in prints, woodblocks, papier mâché, and sculptures stands in-between art and craft, light and weight, and simple and complex. It reflects her journeys through Aligarh, Bangkok, Tokyo, Delhi, Paris, Bonn, and New York. For this dramatic and mystic imagery Night Fall, she seems to have worked without taking recourse to any tools. She possibly poured the slurry paper as if it were molten metal to cast it into this conical triangular form with recessed inner grooves, angles, and lines— a practice she seems to have mastered. The light emanating from subtle shades of black and grey interlaced with copper, gold, and ochre flickers to lend the composition a quiet and pensive oeuvre.

1984
Artist: Zarina Hashmi
Sculpture in cast-paper
Dimensions: 64.77 x 68.58 x 17.78 cm
In the private collection of Renu Modi

UNTITLED

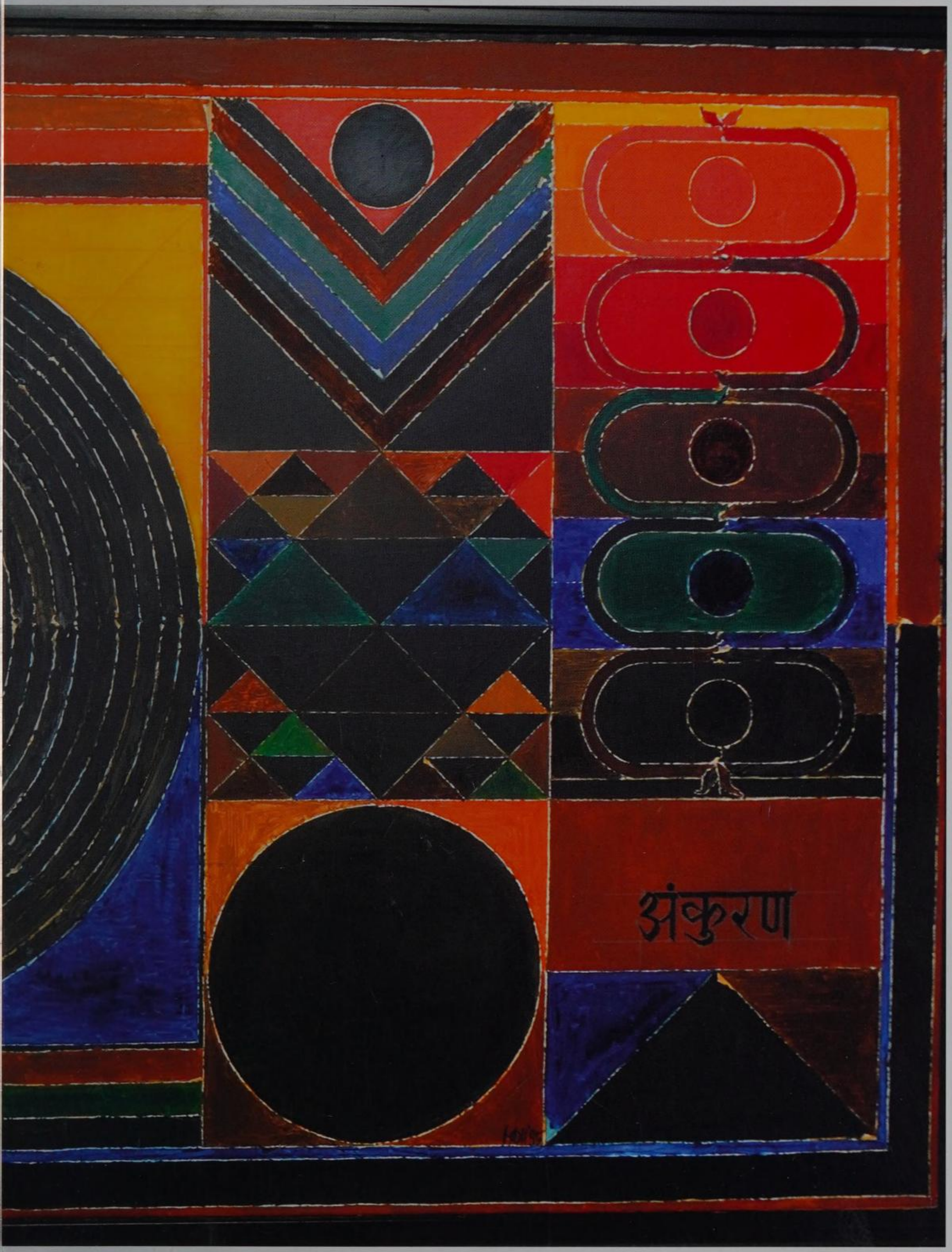
K.G. Subramanyan (b. 1924) is one of India's most respected artists. He is revered as much for his aesthetic versatility as for his pedagogic contribution. He played a part in the Indian Freedom movement. He taught art and carried forward his own creativity across a wide spectrum—as a painter, muralist, sculptor, theoretician, writer, and illustrator of stories for children, bringing an original perspective to contemporary Indian art. This acrylic on acrylic painting reflects his mastery in working simultaneously across various strands to create what appears as an assimilation of the playful and serious, the traditional and contemporary, planned and spontaneous. While there are clear links to the Patua paintings from Kalighat (folk art tradition) of Bengal and to the glass painting tradition of south India in his choice of form and materials in the imagery, the narrative itself appears fresh, free, and contemporary with a metaphysical underlining in its fine figuration and rich palette.

1985
Artist: K. G. Subramanyan
Painting in acrylic on acrylic
Dimensions: 91x 61 cm
Possibly from Santiniketan,
West Bengal, India
In the private collection of
Rohit Gandhi and Rahul Khanna

UNTITLED

Maqbool Fida Husain (1915–2011) known as M.F. Husain was one of India's most admired and prolific artists from Mumbai who was on a self-imposed exile for the last few years of his life as several legal cases had been filed against him in India— since his paintings were misinterpreted by some as anti-Hindu. He was a self-taught artist who started his career as a billboard painter but soon joined the clique of young progressives in Mumbai and engaged with the Indian *avant-garde* at an international level. His large repertoire of work also includes films. The present work like his most others is colourful and replete with motifs that are uniquely Indian. The archetypal composition presents a kaleidoscopic imagery of Indian woman in her various *avatars*—modern and ancient, everyday, and mythological. There is Mother Teresa in her identifiable blue-bordered sari, a mother in a yellow sari with a child, and *gopi* with Lord Krishna and his cow— all compressed into a single frame. The composition with faces painted sans any features is typical of his style and as evocative as can be.

1990
Artist: Maqbool Fida Husain
Oil on canvas painting
Dimensions: 124.5 x 269.2 cm
In the collection of the
Kiran Nadar Museum of Art,
New Delhi, India



GERMINATION

Syed Haider Raza or S.H. Raza (b. 1922) also known as Raza, works in abstract and geometric patterns loaded with philosophical ideas inspired by his readings of the *Vedas* and childhood memories of the forests near the village where he grew up in central India. His work engages with themes around the primordial dot or *bindu*. The five natural elements—fire, earth, water, air, and ether (*pancha tattva*) and a contemplative silence and inner voice (*nad*) appear to coalesce in this painting. The cosmic energy to create and procreate ascends in a coiled energy at the centre of the circles (*chakras*) while the inverted triangles seem to suggest a unification of the female energy with the male seed (*ankuran*) along the axis of consciousness. Raza was a founder member of the Mumbai Progressive Artists' Group and is possibly one of the most influential artists of post-independence India. Raza who has lived in Paris for most of his life continues to engage with metaphysical concepts that bring ancient symbolism alive in lyrical palette and evocative compositions.

1995
Artist: Syed Haider Raza
Painting in acrylic on canvas
Dimensions: 99.1 x 198.1 cm
In the private collection of
Shalini and Sanjay Passi

UNTITLED

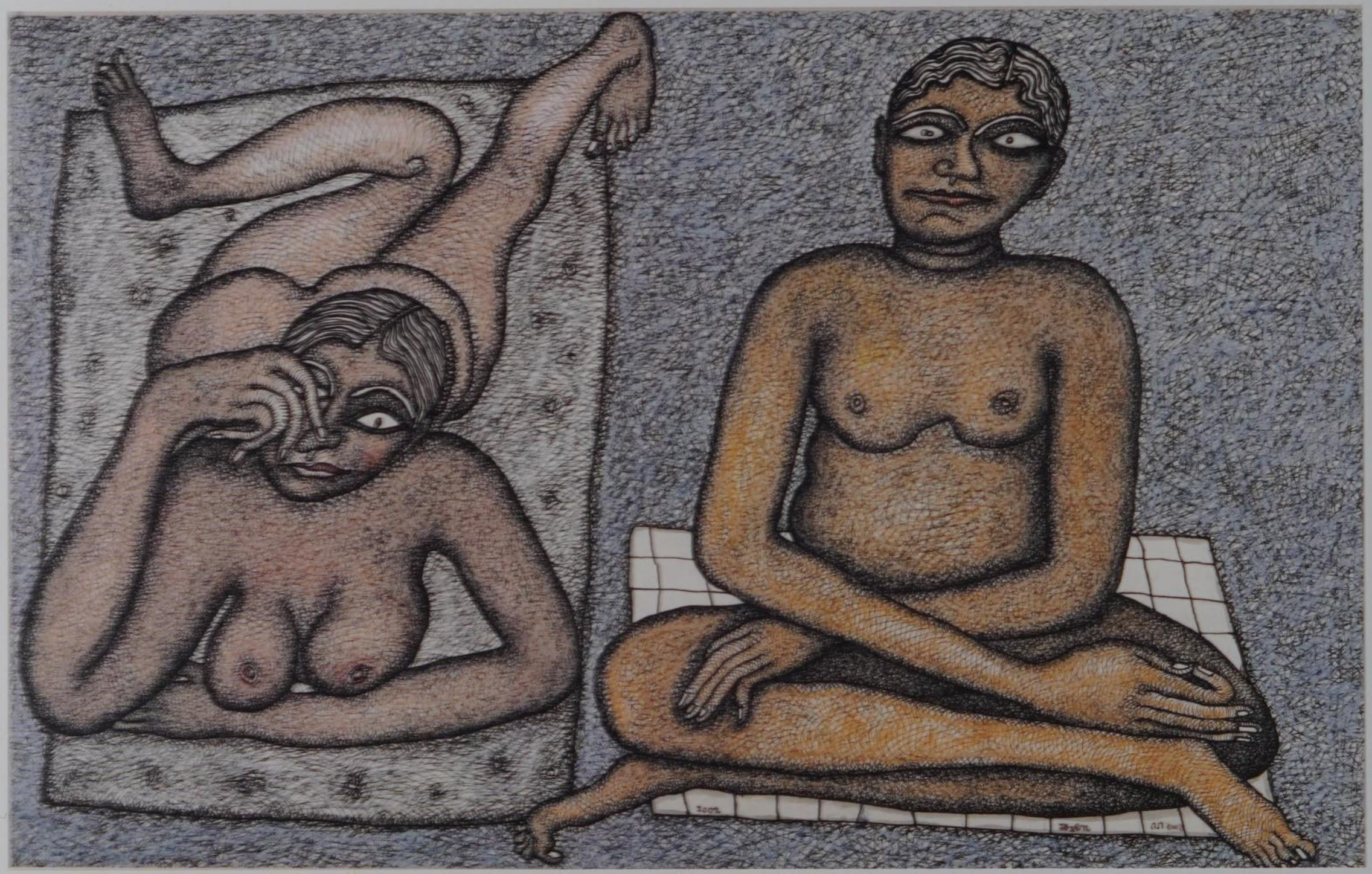
Manjit Bawa (1941–2008) worked as a silkscreen printer in Britain and studied art there following his initial training at the college of art in Delhi. His work revolves around Indian mythology and Sufi and Punjabi poetry. His canvases are distinguishable for their imagery and palette. The ochre of the sunflowers, the green of the paddy fields, the red of the sun, and the blue of the mountains and sky, offer a contrast to the dominance of pink, red, and violet in traditional Indian imagery. This untitled painting features man-animal encounter where both appear in hybrid forms— part real part fictional— to make it an attractive and engaging painting. The chubby man with short legs and his curly flowing hairdo is seen dancing atop what could be a big cat or its derivative. This displays the artist's love for animals and birds that make a recurring appearance in his art, often in human company, frequently represented as Lord Krishna.

1995
Artist: Manjit Bawa
Painting in oil on canvas
Dimensions: 223.5 x 152.4 cm
In private collection

MAHISHASURA

Tyeb Mehta (1925–2009) was part of the Progressive Artists' Group and one of the most sought after artists from India. Although he started his career in films and wanted to be a filmmaker, art turned out to be his calling. He excelled at his limited but highly meticulous and finely executed body of work. His artistic quest has remained steadfastly embroiled in anguish and frustration as reflected in his canvases with broken and diagonal imaging. The trauma of India's partition in 1947 could be the reason behind the inherent solitude of his painting. Mahishasura reflects his preference for painting through metaphors. The painting in orange, brown, and black features a trussed bull with a fallen figure. This was the first Indian work to cross a million-dollar mark at an auction in New York. The work has been described as 'karmic origami'. It depicts Hindu Goddess Durga slaying the demon Mahishasura whom Mehta has transformed into a sympathetic figure, following his encounter with the divine goddess as featured in this painting.

1997
Artist: Tyeb Mehta
Painting in acrylic on canvas
Dimensions: 150 x 120cm
In private collection



UNTITLED

Jogen Chowdhury (b. 1939), has had a multifaceted career as a museum curator, designer for the Handicrafts Board, teacher at Santiniketan, writer and above all, a painter par excellence. He is one of the foremost artists of post-independence India. Jogen's overbearing imagery often features intertwined, lithe, and mutilated figuration. His work has a uniquely Indian ethos reverberating with satire mixed with anguish on contemporary socio-political issues. The couple featured in this painting in pen and ink and pastels with cross hatchings, has the man sitting cross-legged and the woman stretched out beside him, both in nude. The dramatics and difference in their postures with the alert and attentive man seated, and the woman lying on her front with her legs twisted and possibly exhausted and brooding conveys something of their dynamics and temperaments. The lines and folds of their skins and the markings on the mats they are sitting on, lend an odd, lyrically erotic feel to the composition that Jogen's work is renowned for.

2002
Artist: Jogen Chowdhury
Painting in pen and ink with oil pastels on paper
Dimensions: 34.3 x 55.9 cm
In the private collection of
Radhika and Rajan Anandan

COLLECTED AND POOLED

Rameshwar Broota (b.1941) is as great an artist as teacher with a remarkable career of nearly half a century. He continues to experiment and device new ways to examine the ways of the world and the man. Moving away from images of existential anxiety that he had started with, he took to sharp satire and then moved on to featuring classic heroism. His art is precariously situated somewhere between hope and despair. It reverberates around the ordinary but not to the exclusion of the heroic. Man and his anxieties are the central themes for his art and engagement as reflected in this painting. The painted surface is refined and scraped with blade which is the artist's attempt to unravel the depths of the self-contained man's inner strength. The solitary male bares it all through his physicality and solid muscularity as depicted in his flesh and posturing including the finger and the hands in this composition.

2003
Artist: Rameshwar Broota
Painting in oil on canvas, scraped with blade
Dimensions: 152.4 x 152.4 cm
In private collection

Progressive Artists' Group

M.F. Husain, Untitled, oil on canvas
S.H. Raza, Bindu Et Arber, painting in acrylic on a vase (above)

The Progressive Artists' Group formed in the tumultuous year of 1947 in Mumbai had a diverse cast of six founder members K. H. Ara, S. K. Bhakre, M. F. Husain, H. A. Gade, S. H. Raza, and F.N. Souza, each representing different cultural and religious affiliations. Thus making it a cosmopolitan group with the motto 'to go forward'. This revolutionary group is acknowledged as the most free-spirited and influential collective of artists credited with successfully combining Indian subject matter with European modernism in independent India. The Progressives were forceful and vocal about their intention to make a difference in art. It had leftist leanings and the artists belonging to the group denounced the prevalent academic realism as well as the legacy of the previous generation of leading Indian artists and teachers as too sentimental and constrained. Rabindranath Tagore was declared as too self-obsessed, Amrita Sher-Gil's art was regarded as hybrid, and Jamini Roy's work was considered to be unsophisticated and crude.

The Progressives engaged unapologetically with European impressionist colours, cubist forms, and expressionist styles while their ethos remained linked to the soil. Theirs was a group of star artists, ranging from barefooted M. F. Husain who continued to make waves with his wide ranging creative work from paintings to films to installations, to Souza who came as a surprise to London critics, to Raza who settled and worked in France returning to India only recently while Ara, Bhakre, and Gade carried on working based in India and making a name for themselves. Other equally influential artists who associated with the group included V. S. Gaitonde, Krishen Khanna, Akbar Padamsee, Tyeb Mehta, Ram Kumar, and Bal Chabda. Each of them worked in a dramatically different genre and evolved an individual style but they also showed their work collectively. The group ultimately split up in 1956 with many of them gradually fading away.

Although the Progressive Artists' Group has often been criticized for being self-obsessed and failing to respond to the angst of India's partition, their artistic legacy continues to live in the large body of critically acclaimed work that is often featured in important art exhibitions, auctions, and significant private and public collections around the world. The Progressives espoused the cause for working in free abundance without worrying unduly about the content or technique so long as the art is based on sound elements and aesthetics. They are credited with having changed the tone of the art discourse in India away from its obsession with nativity of folk and tribal art, classical Indian, and Mughal miniature art towards a more open synthesis of the East and West. They ushered in the modern art movement in India and paved the way for the current generation of artists to work more freely across media, materials, and modes and gain acceptability both at national and international levels.

K.H. Ara, Untitled, gouache on paper

PHANTOM LADY OR KISMET SERIES

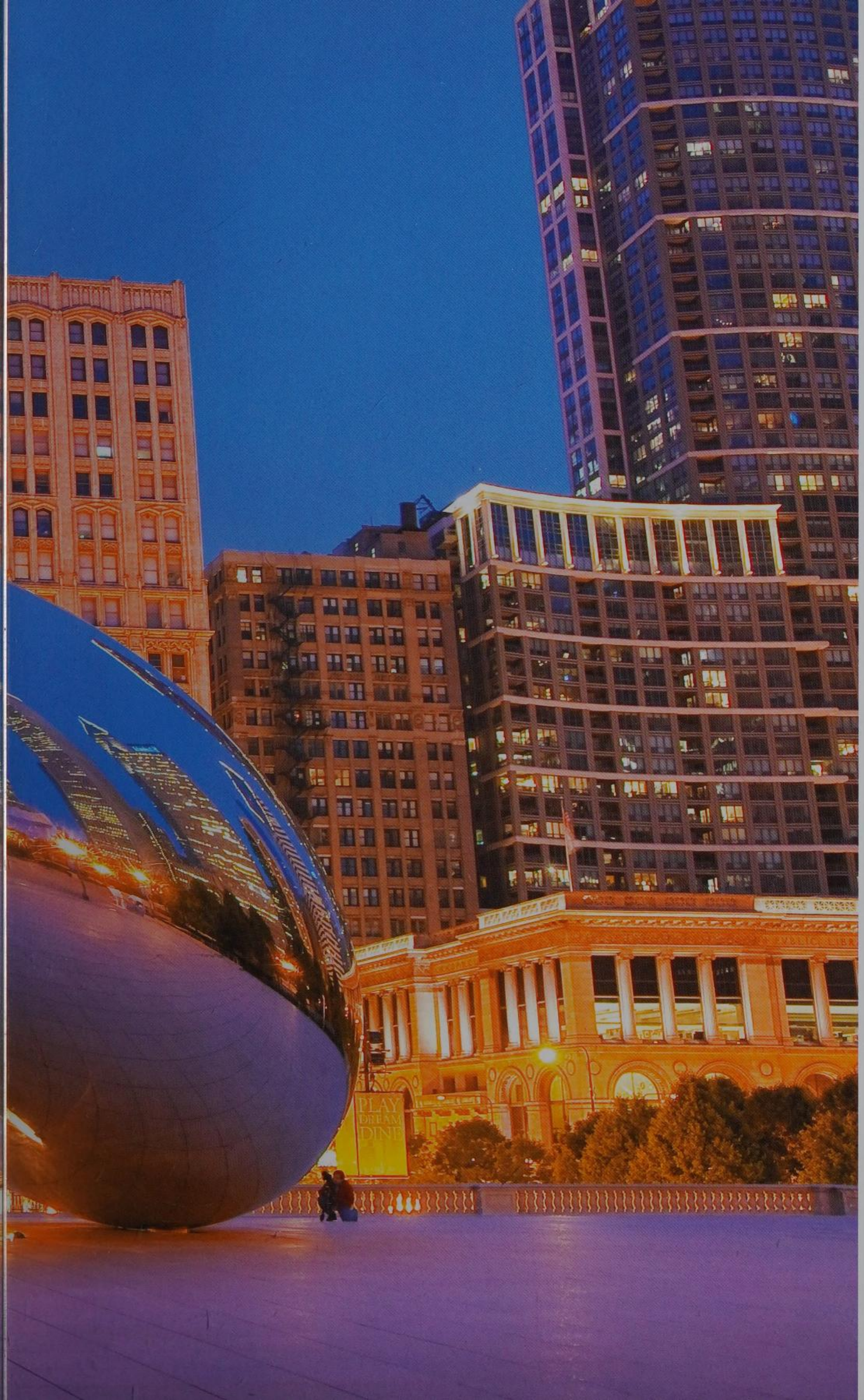
Bangalore based Pushpamala N (b. 1956) is a trained sculptor, a practicing photo- and video-performance artist and a producer-cum-director. Her work in the genre of popular culture resonates with humour and social commentary. She explores the stereotypical image of the Indian female as reflected in Bollywood films, mythology, text, media, and photography. She herself is the lead cast for most of her work, as in the one featured here which is part of her 'Phantom Lady' series. It is a spoof on the thriller about twin sisters separated at birth. One of the sisters is called 'Phantom Lady' (Pushpamala herself) inspired from the Indian film heroine, Nadia. She is trying to search for her vampy sister and rescue her from the underworld. The series shot mostly in night-time Mumbai with its Bollywood-style narrative has a surreal atmosphere full of similes and puns that examines issues of gender in a contemporary urban Indian context.

1996–1998
Artist: Pushpamala N
Silver gelatin print
Dimensions: 40.6 x 50.8 cm
Photo credit: Meenal Agarwal
In private collection

STOP THINK GO

Jiten Thukral (b. 1976) and Sumir Tagra (b. 1979) known as Thukral and Tagra or T&T, are a Gurgaon-based young artist-designer duo known for their collaborative cutting edge and in-your-face work in painting, graphics, sculpture, installations, video design, websites, music, and fashion. Their conceptually based art, often in large scale can be both delightful and provocative. This striking diptych was part of the artists' debut New York show that addressed the problem of HIV and AIDS in India. The large colourful painting in acrylic and oil features semi-clad couples of all genders lying together, possibly sleeping. They are surrounded by suggestive motifs such as alphabets, condoms, clothes, and flowers, etc., and some of the T&T's signature devices on a decorative spread. The sensual beauty in the depiction of the realistic-looking couples combines the surreal with the real in pre- and post-coital stages as it reflects contemporary society's hypocritical and materialistic approach to the issue of human sexual behaviour in an open and subversive way. The duo creates art which is playful and humorous, but also raises some important thought-provoking issues by attempting to blur the distinction between fine arts and popular culture. They represent the current trend in Indian art that is at home also in an international context.

2006–2007
Artists: Thukral and Tagra
Acrylic and oil on canvas
Dimensions: 182.88 x 304.8 cm (diptych)



CLOUD GATE

This sculpture created by the Mumbai born (b. 1954) and London based, Anish Kapoor, was selected following a global design competition inviting entries for an artwork design for the Millennium Park site. It is made of 168 stainless steel plates welded together. Its highly polished exterior has no visible seams and the large installation weighs 110 short tons. The surface of the sculpture, which is inspired from liquid mercury, reflects the city's skyline and the visitors are able to walk around and under its arch. On the underside is a concave chamber that multiplies the reflections. It is an artistic and technical marvel which took longer than anticipated to make and install. The sculptor who is a winner of the much coveted 1991 Turner prize stands apart for his strong and individual aesthetics, which combine the best of the East and the West. Kapoor's work adorns an abstract and ethereal ethos. It is immersed in a modernist conceptualization around perception of space with a feel for pure materiality and fascination with pigment, excavations, and manipulation of form. A highly inventive contemporary artist of international stature, he has a large body of work to his credit, including the Marsyas that was on display at the Tate Modern's Turbine Hall.

2004–2006
Artist: Anish Kapoor
Public sculpture in stainless steel plates welded together
Dimensions: 10 x 13 x 20 m
Assembled and displayed at the AT&T Plaza, Millennium Park, Chicago, Illinois, USA

RADHA

Ravinder Reddy (b. 1956) is known for his larger-than-life decorated heads and figures, which are mainly of women that seem to come from another era. These could be either ancient Indian or Egyptian or may be Mexican. They seem to be part totem part pop. The wide-eyed figures appear somewhat crude and defiant from one angle and agile and elegant from another. They are marked by a subtle rawness beneath the flimsy glamour of the surface. Radha appears in a fusion of Hindu sculptural tradition with a contemporary pop sensibility. The figure is modelled with remarkable skill and painted in dazzling colours. Radha's gargantuan head, hair parted in the front, flamboyant coiffeur at the back, adorned with sculpted flowers and jewellery, some gilded make her look grand and erotic akin to a *yakshi* (or a semi-divine deity). She presents a formidable spectacle in her unblinking frontal gaze. With her rounded volumes and chiselled features, Radha appears somewhat detached, in-between the urban and the rural, may be a cultural hybrid or kitsch.

2007
Artist: Ravinder Reddy
Sculpture in gold leaf on polyester resin fibre glass
Dimensions: 200.7 x 162.6 x 200.7 cm
In Julie Walsh Collection, Chicago, USA

DOUBTING THOMAS

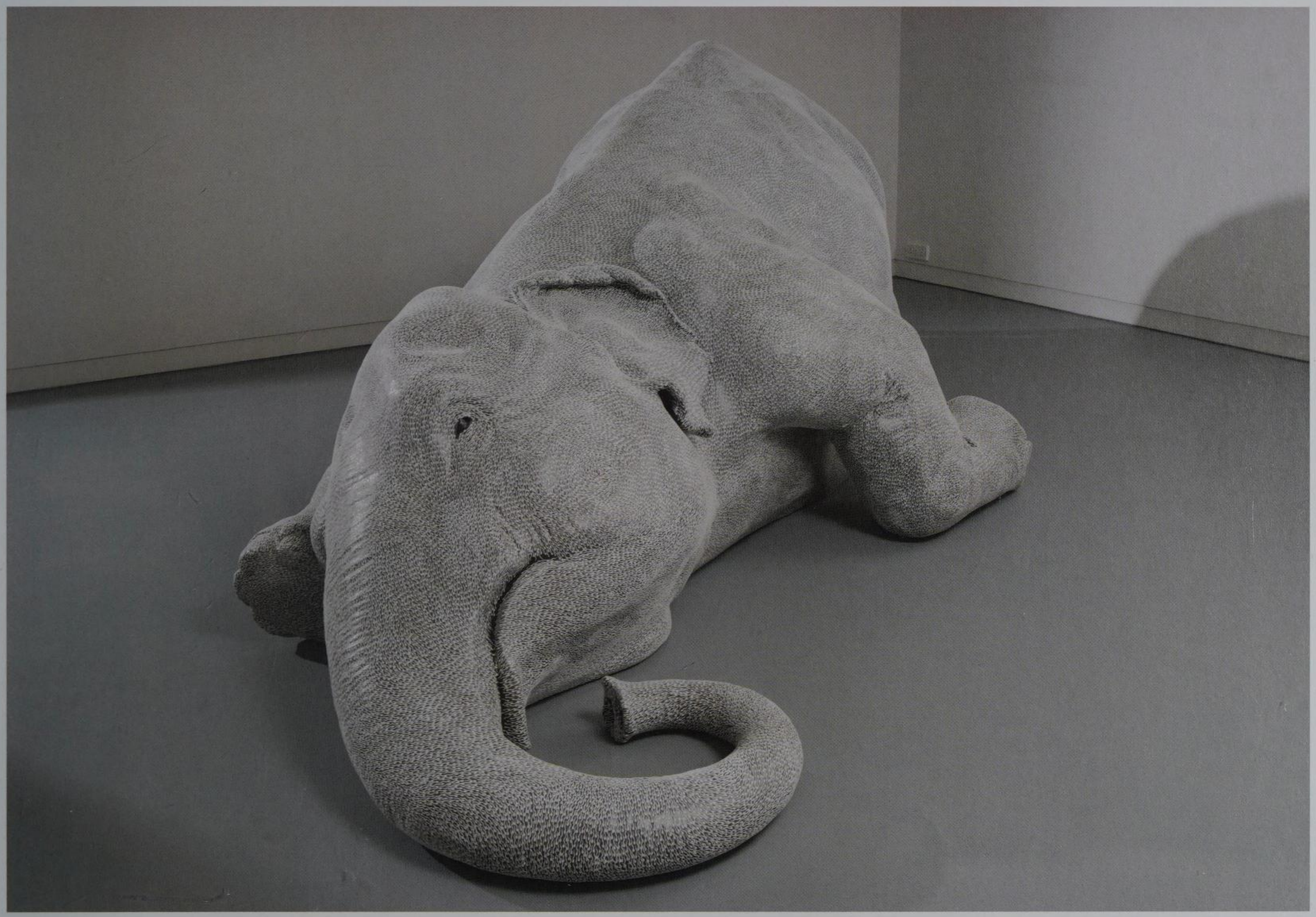
Bangalore-based Ravi Kumar Kashi (b. 1968) is an artist, art teacher, and writer. He works in varied media: painting, printmaking, collage, sculpture, digital, video, and installation art in a combination of figuration, abstraction, and narrative; all of which is concept based. He has specialized in making his own paper with various materials such as cotton, jute, etc., using techniques that he learnt first in the UK and then in South Korea. Shaped like a human torso 'Doubting Thomas' as a moulded paper sculpture has an uncanny resemblance to the inner body parts that one tries to hide by wearing clothes or otherwise covering up. It also makes a comment on the fragility of the human body and the concept of regeneration. It provokes the viewer to rethink about objects and images juxtaposed in ambiguous contexts and arrangements. The artist's take on a Christian theme also seems to raise issues of lack of faith and distrust.

2008–2009
Artist: Ravi Kumar Kashi
Torso cast in pulp made from cotton rag, Daphne bark fibre, and water soluble pastels
Dimensions: 63 x 40 cm each
In the collection of the artist

SOMEONE LEFT A HORSE ON THE SHORE

Gigi Scaria (b. 1973) works in varied media including sculpture and video focusing on the new India with its distorted notion of development as reflected in the shift from 'rural backyards' to 'upscale metros' with high-rise multiplexes that submerge the green cover and break up the social fabric. The shift is featured in some amazingly large but calm-looking beautiful images, in succinct multi-media installations mixed with irony and politics of consumerism. The sculpture here looks like a re-assembly of building blocks and constructs. It is transported and strategically located in an open unkempt peripheral landscape, which Scaria knows is bound to disappear as the city expands to accommodate the influx of immigrants. In a quaint take on the Trojan tale, he turns the horse inside out to explore issues of migration, displacement, and class attitude in the context of changing city structures while simultaneously expressing his environmental concerns.

2007
Artist: Gigi Scaria
Sculpture in wood, mirror glass, and paint
Dimensions: 307.3 x 114.3 x 320 cm
In private collection



THE SKIN SPEAKS A LANGUAGE NOT ITS OWN

Bharti Kher (b. 1969) born in London, trained in art at Newcastle, and based in Delhi takes inspiration for her internationally renowned art from daily life and surroundings. Her eye catching art is about dislocation and transience, which reflects her own, largely itinerant life. The work mostly autobiographical with the concept of home, identity, culture, and consumerism as a recurrent theme appears in varied media including painting, collage, sculpture, digital work, and installation. Her hybrid creations, part kitsch part surreal, are impressive. They incorporate a unique outside-in perspective given her mixed experiences of an early life in the UK and subsequently in India. The much talked and written about elephant featured here uses *bindis*, a traditional dot worn by Indian women on the forehead. Covered in *bindis*, the life-size Indian female elephant, which is a symbol of power and royalty, appears here with her head resting on the front foot and her glassy black eye entreating the viewer. It took the artist over 10 months to create the elephant whose every fold of the skin and recess of its sunken form is meticulously contoured and covered in intricately arranged patterns with thousands of *bindis* placed on the surface one-by-one. The amazing work uses *bindi* as a symbolic and stylistic device to play on the pluralism of Indian culture. Embodying multi-layered meanings and interpretations across cultures and ages, it touches on issues around rituals and gender.

2006–2007
Artist: Bharti Kher
Fibreglass and vinyl bindies
Dimensions: 167.6 x 152.4 x 457.2 cm
In the collection of the
Queensland Art Gallery,
Queensland, Australia

GANDHI'S THREE MONKEYS

Subodh Gupta, (b. 1964) is often hailed on the international scene as bigger than most other practicing contemporary artist from India. He is renowned for his remarkable ability to transform works of art into monumental installations. His art takes mundane articles of everyday use from the Indian sub-continent on to a higher pedestal of objectified idealized beauty in gallery precincts. In this gigantic sculptural group, 'Gandhi's Three Monkeys', which was on display in the public square outside the main halls at the Basel Art fair in 2008, Subodh soldiered a variety of old and new pots, utensils, and milk pans— items that his family back home in the hinterland of India in Bihar have been using for years. The objects are assembled carefully to ensure their symbolic association with the philosophy of Gandhi who used simple elements like salt and homespun yarn to bring down the British colonial rule in India. His version of Gandhi's three monkeys depicts them looking in amazement at today's scenario, as the eccentric almost overbearing imaginings swing from myth to reality and serene to fierce, rural to urban. Constructed along lines similar to his sculpture 'Very Hungry God' which is now part of an important European collection, these large and heavy contemplative figures seem to draw one's attention to issues of pollution, terrorism, and warfare.

2007–2008
Artist: Subodh Gupta
Bronze, old utensils, steel and stands
Dimensions:
1st head (Military Mask): 175 x 125 x 150 cm
2nd head (Terrorist Mask): 200 x 131 x 155 cm
3rd head (Gas Mask): 184 x 140 x 256 cm

COME GIVE US A SPEECH

N.S. Harsha (b. 1969) works in grid-like compositions that feature recurring motifs like in this painting that depicts a panoramic view of rows of young figures sitting attentively almost tied to their brightly coloured plastic chairs as if waiting for some order or speech to begin, but wanting to break free if they can. The painting has 1, 999 figures to be precise. These men and woment each one differently poised and lost in own personal thoughts feature and interesting socio-cultural collective, with two strange forms hovering above. When the viewer shifts his focus from one to the other he assumes the role of the speaker, not realizing what is being thrown at him. The artist's interest in this politics-of-memory and crowd behavior or herd mentality is cleverly articulated in this painting. This work received critical acclaim and the much coveted award when it was exhibited at the Artes Mundi 3, National Museum in Cardiff, UK, a few years ago. Harsha works in varied media and genres with equal ease ranging from large-scale intricately detailed paintings to site-specific installations to collaborative and participatory projects—all of which are layered with similar conceptual depth.

2007–2008
A six-panel painting acrylic on canvas
Artist: N.S. Harsha
Dimensions: 182.8 x 1097.2 cm
In collection of the artist

SINGING CLOUD

Shilpa Gupta (b.1976) from Mumbai creates artwork using interactive videos, websites, objects, photographs, and sound and public performances to probe and subversively examine issues of human interest. Singing Cloud suspended from the ceiling is a large amoebic shaped form made out of thousands of microphones. The cloud, appearing hybrid or disembodied, is featured in a state of stillness. Suddenly in a hysterical move, the microphones start to grow, as though woken up from a slumber. Re-collecting themselves from their dis-functionality, they begin to whisper and then sing by themselves even though there are no listeners. The sound shifts and floats in a multitude of voices and modes of travel, suggestive of movements of people, their coming together, and then the clash of histories as desires and memories rise and fall. Her multimedia work comes lined with political consciousness and conceptual depth that engages the viewer to participate and make his choices.

2008–2009
Artist: Shilpa Gupta
Object built with thousands of microphones with 48 multi-channel audio
9min 30sec audio loop
Dimensions: 457x61x152 cm
Commissioned by Le Laboratoire, Paris
In the collection of the Louisiana Museum, Denmark

HARNESSING POWER

Satish Gujral (b. 1925), represents the post-independence phase of Indian modernism in a distinct iconography spanning across painting, drawing, sculpture, mural, and architectural design. The veteran artist's finely executed figurative painterly work in rich colours appears in contrast to the impressions of his early years of solitude due to a hearing impairment, the trauma of India's partition, and anxieties about the country's changing profile. In Harnessing Power, the artist shifts his gear from working in burnt wood or metal to sculpting with fibre-reinforced polymer. In terms of form too, he engages not with deities or other worldly creatures but plays with contemporary forms and themes. The imagery is inspired by a street electrician attempting to fix the light by climbing a lamppost. He is mounted precariously on a makeshift scaffolding that looks like a machine. He is looking down from the top with a *damru* or drum in one hand and holding on to the machine with the other and while he does so he is being watched by the strange forms above. The work reinforces his interest in experimenting with overlapping forms and patterns.

2010
Artist: Satish Gujral
Sculpture in fibre reinforced polymer
Dimensions: 248.9 cm
In the collection of the
Gujral Art Museum, New Delhi, India

'THIS TOO SHALL PASS' SERIES

Sudarshan Shetty (b. 1961) is considered to be one of his generation's most innovative conceptual artists in India. He works in varied media and is best known for his enigmatic animated installations. Immersed in an ideation around psychological, social, or personal encounters, his art appears as a de-construction, born out of the materials it is featured in. This work is a part of his large exhibition entitled 'This Too Shall Pass' that opened at the newly refurbished Bhau Daji Lad Museum in Mumbai in 2010. The work is a comment on the museum's permanent collection. This striking wooden archway which is elaborately carved with a tree of life motif with intricate leaves and twines looks pretty from a distance. On closer inspection, one sees a sword precariously placed under the archway and swinging like a pendulum counting time ominously almost threatening to behead the viewer. Sudarshan worked with traditional craftsmen and materials to create this installation, re-lives the dwindling oral Indian practice by presenting it in a contemporary museum space thus playing with contradictions at multiple levels.

2010
Artist: Sudarshan Shetty
Installation in carved wood, electro-magnetic mechanism, steel sword, mild steel
Dimensions: 354 x 278 x 106 cm

BAGGAGE CLAIM

Jitish Kallat (b. 1974) works across varied media: painting, sculptural installations (often in large scale) photography, and video art in bold and vivid visuals. Somewhat autobiographical in its thrust his visually amazing work is mostly conceptual. It suggests references to Asian and European traditions, incorporating idea; image; and materials from popular urban culture, and contemporary society; advertisements; and media. The cultural dualities of sprawling Mumbai metropolis where he belongs runs through his aesthetics which is noted for its spontaneity and skilled craftsmanship. The triptych here presents a busy buzzing web as people, cars, houses, trees, insects appear floating and huddled together, each looking in a different direction and in a world of his own. The composition is painted from photographs of people waiting with their luggage at railway stations waiting with their luggage. It appears interlaced with people's hair, which evokes an eerie feel of a cascading narrative. The grotesque bronze creatures hovering above drip and stain the forms below, as they try to clutch on to the painting. The black oily bubbles or clouds possibly from machines threaten the urban horizon and life. His work here—fluctuating between hope and pain, beauty and beast, survival and decay, reality and fantasy, personal and collective or intimacy and monumentality—much like his other globally appreciated repertoire, is characterized by its contrasting play of ideation and narratives.

2010
Artist: Jitish Kallat
Acrylic on canvas, bronze
Dimensions: 243.84 x 518.16 cm (triptych)

REVOLUTIONARY FORCES (THE THREE TASTERS)

The Raqs Media Collective founded in 1992 is a Delhi based trio of Jeebesh Bagchi (b.1965), Monica Narula (b.1969), and Shuddhabrata Sengupta (b.1968) producing work that has been described as 'kinetic contemplation', of hybrid and compelling contemporary art. They use video and internet practice inspired by their rigorously analytical academic work with a distinct socio-political signature and their expertise in filmmaking. The image here is from a dynamic-multimedia-interactive sculptural installation with text performed by three volunteers who tell three stories. The ground under them is in a state of constant motion and as it turns around, they turn inside out too. The actors speak about illusions, liberty, and solidarity, and substance of stone, which though unbreakable becomes fluid in their accounts. They drink the arrack of stone like the 'three tasters' and the brief ends to read, 'revolutions occur when the apparently unyielding rock of our world melts and flows like heady wine'.

2011
Artists: Raqs Media Collective
Kinetic sculpture with rotating platforms, custom-built surfaces, apparel, script, 2 DVDs, 2 DVD players, monitors, and actors
Dimensions: 487.5 cm in diameter, 91.5x23 cm high
In the collection of the Moonchu Foundation, Hong Kong

FOR(E)PLAY

Mithu Sen (b. 1971) is one of the young vibrant faces on the contemporary Indian art scene. Her work critiques the clichéd feminine associations using humour and occasionally her own encounters and self, with drawing, painting, objects, and collage. This wall painted and incised with fork, knife, hammer, spoon, and her own nails, was made during a residency at the Khoj Artists Studio in Delhi in February 2011. The transient work centres on the idea of fashion, which she turned around by re-coursing into a reverse gear. She peeled the skin off the wall just like disrobing herself and then painted over it to make this temporal experimental time- and site-specific creation that no longer exists. Mithu who also writes poetry describes the work as follows:

I am stripteasing. Disrobing my concrete lover.
Using chisel, hammer, fork, knife —my nails —I began taking the skin off.
A hidden sense of belonging. Retreating into this shell.
Peeling it layer by layer until my lover gazes back at me

2011
Artist: Mithu Sen
Site installation, wall painting
in mixed media
Dimensions: 365 x 304 cm

XII
I
XI
VI

REMAINS FOREVER

Viveek Sharma (b. 1968) is an artist whose work is recognized for its large-sized photorealistic metaphorical paintings on socio-political transformation of Indian society in a contemporary global context. His work features eminent figures, popular icons, important historical moments and mythological figures ranging from Mahatma Gandhi to Obama to Lord Ganesha and included shanty township of Dharavi or the terror siege of 26/11 and meanders around the landmark sites and stories associated with India's commercial capital, Mumbai, in a mix of the real and imagined. This impressive artwork here re-contextualizes contemporary history for the viewer. The large narrative canvas features a horse-drawn coach on the seafront near gateway of India lit in metallic blue city lights as the artist himself appears on the left side of the frame admiring the scene as the clock ticks nearby. Popular culture seems to be an integral element in Viveek's well-oiled and impressive images.

2011
Artist: Viveek Sharma
Painting oil on canvas
Dimensions: 152.4 x 335.3 cm (diptych)
In the collection of the artist

Art Historical Timeline

	TIME PERIOD (ca.)	ERA	POLITICAL AND SOCIO-CULTURAL DEVELOPMENTS	DEVELOPMENTS IN ART
Pre-Historic Roots of Indian Art (30000 BC–1500 BC)	From 30000 BC to 11000 BC	Upper Palaeolithic Age	Nomadic existence, hunting groups	Simple markings in cave shelters at Bhimbetka; rudimentary stone tools
	From 11000 BC to 7000 BC	Mesolithic Age	Hunting and gathering; subsistence communities; nature worship	More elaborate etchings, paintings and bruisings on rocks
	From 7000 BC to 3000 BC	Neolithic Age	Settlement of communities; domestication of animals; development of agriculture; beginning of fertility cults and nature worship	Metal implements; terracotta figurines; pottery
	From 3000 BC to 2300 BC	Pre-Indus Valley	Development of organized societies; beginning of multi-roomed structures at Mehrgarh; idol worship	Pottery; painted terracotta figurines mainly of females and bulls; beads and shell pendants
	From 2300 BC to 1750 BC	Indus Valley Civilization	Development of hierarchical societies; urbanized planned cities; baked-brick architecture; trade with Mesopotamia; writing on seals; fertility cult; proto-Shaivite cult	Seals, bronze, and terracotta figurines; small stone sculpture; pottery painted with geometric, animal and leaf forms using minerals
Ancient Indian Art: The Vedic and Buddhist Traditions (1500 BC onwards)	From 1500 BC to 800 BC	Vedic Period	End of the Indus Valley Civilization; compilation of the *Vedas*	Making of black ware and red ware
	From 800 BC to 450 BC	Upanishadic Phase	Development of kingdoms/republics *mahajanapadas* (kingdoms); trade routes from Magadha to Western Asia; Shakyamuni Buddha (ca. 563 BC–483 BC), beginning of Buddhism and Jainism (ca. 540 BC–468 BC); compilation of the epics *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*	Development of painted grey and Northern Black polished ware; megaliths
	From 323 BC to 185 BC	Mauryan Dynasty	Political unification of the subcontinent including parts of the south; rise of Chandragupta (ca. 323 BC–297 BC); Ashoka (ca. 272 BC –231 BC); Third Buddhist Council set up	Buddhist *stupas*; Ashokan pillars; capitals; inscriptions; sculptural art with surface polish; rock-cut architecture
	From 185 BC to 1st century BC	Sunga Dynasty	Pushyamitra Shunga assassinates the last Mauryan King Brihadratha	Free-standing *yakshas* and *yakshis* sculptures; decorated railing, and gateways of Bharhut *stupa*, rock-cut monastic complex at Bhaja; gateways at Great Stupa of Sanchi; rock-cut architecture in the Deccan and Orissa
	From late 1st century AD to 3rd century AD	Kushana Dynasty	Kanishka (ca. AD 127– AD 151); Fourth Buddhist Council	Royal portrait statuary; Buddhist *stupas*; Gandhara and Mathura schools of art depicting *bodhisattvas* and events from Buddha's life; Hindu deities; Jain *tirthankaras*
	From AD 128 to early 3rd century AD	Satavahana Dynasty	Vasishthiputra Pulamavi (ca. AD 130–AD 159)	Rock-cut Buddhist caves; the Great Stupa at Amaravati
	From AD 319 to AD 500	Gupta Dynasty	Chandragupta I (ca. AD 319–AD 335) founder of the Gupta Empire; Samudragupta (ca. AD 335–AD 376); Chandragupta II (ca. AD 380–AD 415); compilation of Bharata's *Natyashastra* focussing on *Rasa* Theory; establishment of the famous Buddhist monastic university at Nalanda; writing of the *Vishnudharmottara*, an important *Shilpa Shastra* text	Creation of 'Gupta Buddha' image; Hindu rock-cut caves at Udayagiri; structural stone architecture at Sanchi; Vishnu temple at Deogarh
Art in Medieval India (7th–13th century)	From late 5th century AD to 7th century AD	Vakataka Dynasty	Harisena (AD 460–AD 478)	Excavated Buddhist cave complexes with sculptures and murals at Ajanta and Ellora; Shaivite cave architecture at Elephanta
	From AD 543 to mid 8th century AD	Early Western Chalukya Dynasty	Pulakesin I secures Badami and fortifies it in AD 543; Pulakesin II (AD 610–AD 642)	Hindu excavated caves featuring different gods and goddesses; structural temples at Aihole, Badami, Pattadakal

	TIME PERIOD (ca.)	ERA	POLITICAL AND SOCIO-CULTURAL DEVELOPMENTS	DEVELOPMENTS IN ART
Art in Medieval India (7th–13th century)	From beginning of 7th century AD to 8th century AD	Pallava Dynasty	Mahendravarman I (ca. AD 600–AD AD 630); Narasimhavarman I (ca. AD 630–AD 668) captures Badami in AD 642; Hsuan-tsang visits Kanchipuram	Hindu rock-cut caves; monolithic temple sculptures like Shore Temple at Mamallapuram
	From mid 8th century AD to AD 973	Rashtrakuta Dynasty	Krishna I (ca. AD 757–AD 773)	Kailasanatha Temple at Ellora
	From early 8th century AD to 11th century AD	Gurjara-Pratihara Dynasty	Nagabhata (ca. AD 730–AD 756)	Hindu structural temples and sculptural art; icons of Jain *tirthankaras*
	From 9th century AD to 11th century AD	Chandella Dynasty	Vidyadhara (ca. AD 1017– AD1029); Krishna Mishra composes the drama *Prabodhachandrodaya*	More elaborate Hindu and Jain temples and sculptural art at Khajuraho
	From AD 760 to 12th century AD	Pala-Sena Period	Dharmapala (ca. AD 770–AD 810); Devapala (AD 810–AD 850)	The Great Stupa at Paharpur; Mahayana and Tantric Buddhist stone and metal icons; illustrated manuscripts on palm-leaf; Hindu sculptural art
	From mid 9th century AD to 11th century AD	Chola Dynasty	Rajaraja I (AD 985–AD 1014) invades Sri Lanka; Rajendra I (AD 1014–AD 1044)	Hindu structural temples including the colossal Rajarajeshvara and the Brihadeshvara temples; Hindu bronze images
Art in Later Medieval India (14th – Mid 18th century)	From AD 1006 to AD 1346	Hoysala Dynasty	Visnuvardhana (ca. AD 1108–AD 1142)	Sculptures and structural temples including the Chennakeshava
	From 1336 to 1565	Vijayanagara Period	Krishnadeva Raya (1509–1530)	Religious and secular architecture; murals; metal images
	From 12th to 16th century	Early Medieval Rajput kingdoms	Prithviraj Chauhan (1149–1192) is defeated by Mohammad Ghori; Hamir Singh I (1326–1364) recaptures Chittor	Forts, Jain miniatures in the indigenous idiom of western India sponsored by merchants and traders
	From 1206 to 1526	Delhi Sultanate	Qutb-ud-din Aibak (1206–1210) establishes the Delhi Sultanate; Mohammad bin Tughlaq (1325–1351); Firoz Shah Tughlaq (1351–1388); Sikander Lodi (1489–1517); Guru Nanak lays the foundation for Sikhism	Quwwat ul-Islam Mosque; Qutab Minar; tombs, gateways, and mosques in the Indo-Islamic idiom
	From 1526 to 1857	Mughal Dynasty	Babur (1526–1530) victorious at the battle of Panipat; Humanyun (1530–56); Akbar (1556–1605); setting up of the imperial Mughal *taswirkhana* (painting atelier), Jahangir (1605–1627) builder of Taj Mahal; Shah Jahan (1628–1658); Aurangzeb (1658–1707)	Mughal miniature paintings and illustrated manuscripts; decorative arts, tombs, Fatehpur Sikri, the forts at Agra and Delhi; Taj Mahal; mosques
Colonial and Modern Indian Art (Mid 18th–Mid 20th century)	From 17th century to 20th century	Late Medieval Rajput kingdoms	Sawai Jai Singh II (1699–1743); Raja Kirpal Pal (1678–95); Sansar Chand (1775–1823)	Palaces and forts at Udaipur and Jaipur; *havelis* (bungalows); Hawa Mahal; miniature paintings in Rajasthan and Pahari states
	From 1757 to 1857	East India Company Phase	East India Company wins the Battle of Plassey in 1757 and Battle of Buxar in 1764.	Company paintings; landscape paintings by British and Indian artists
	From 1857 to 1946	Colonial Period	1857 Uprising; Queen Victoria proclaimed the first Empress of India at the Delhi Durbar in1877; nationalist movement for freedom	Drawings and paintings documenting the geography, history, and culture of India for British records ; modern Indian art (Raja Ravi Varma); Bengal School of Art (Abanindranath Tagore, etc.); use of photography and printing; colonial architecture
Contemporary Indian Art: 1947 to Present	From 1947 Onwards	Contemporary India	India achieves Independence	Progressive Artists' Group; Baroda School; state art institutes, growth of art market; contemporary Indian art on international arena; and Indian art fairs

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As a freelancer, Sushma Bahl has conceived and curated a series of seminal art projects and exhibitions like Fair & Furious based on the theme of women; Ways of Seeing that won the IHC Art India Award for the best curated group show; Vistaar which was an interface between artists and designers; and Annanya which was an overview of contemporary Indian art. She was the Co-director for Indian arts at the Gwacheon Hanmadang Festival in South Korea 2004, Guest Director for XI Triennale-India 2005, Co-curator for the V9/U9 Indo-UK Digital Art Project, Project Consultant for Bharat Rang Mahotsav X11, and a Jury Member for the 14th Asian Art Biennale Bangladesh in 2010. She has edited, written, contributed to several books on art and artists like Thota Vaikuntam, Paresh Maity, Satish Gupta, and Shuvaprasanna.

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